10¢

TEN DETECTIVE ACES

10 STORIES 10¢

DEATH'S TOO GOOD

Gripping Novel

By H. H. STINSON

MURDER MAIDEN

Mystery Novelet

By STEVE FISHER

and

Eight Other Detective Aces

Missing Page

Inside front cover

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Ten Detective Aces [v29 #2, April 1937] ed. A. A. Wyn
(Magazine Publishers, Inc., 10¢, pulp)
10 · Death's Too Good · H. H. Stinson · na
35 · A Bullet for Two · Bob Gordon · ss
40 · The Sealed Clue · Stephen Payne · ss
49 · Default with Doom · Cleve F. Adams · nv
64 · Pacific Peril · Howard J. Perry · ss
75 · The Next Issue of Ten Detective Aces · [uncredited] · ms
76 · Crime's Stepson · S. J. Bailey · ss
86 · Murder Maiden · Steve Fisher · nv
102 · Stunt Devil · James Dyson · ss
113 · The Judas Brand · Clem Beal · ss
117 · A Snitch in Time [Dizzy Duo] · Joe Archibald · ss

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Clip the coupon and mail it. I will prove to you that I can train you at home, in your spare time to be a RADIO EXPERT. I will send you my first lesson FREE. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand—how practical I make learning Radio at home. Then you will know why men without Radio or electrical experience have become Radio Experts and are earning more money than ever as a result of my Training.

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J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
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The issue of SURE-FIRE DETECTIVE now on all newsstands features "Claws of the Hell-Cat," a full-length novel by Steve Fisher; "Corpse's Understudy," a fast-moving, intriguing novelette by Cleve F. Adams, and a large banquet of other ace stories by masters of fiction.

But the members of the "Ace" Magazine family are many. Here are the others:

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SAVE CAR OWNERS 95% OF RING AND REBORE COSTS

If Your Motor Wastes Oil and Gas -- If It Has Lost That "New Car" Power, Speed and Quiet, Send Coupon Below for Free Sample of Miner's Amazing Mineral Discovery Which When Heated Quickly Expands Up to 30 Times

Nearly a quarter of a million car owners have Ovrhauled their motors, saving the cost of rebore and new rings with a scientific product, containing the amazing mineral. It has been awarded the Automotive Test Laboratories Seal of Approval. Salesman and Distributors are cleaning up.

SAVES OIL - - - SAVES GAS

Astounded users report oil savings up to 50% and increased gas mileage up to 45%. This new patented mineral plating process brings new power, pep, speed and quiet to old motors at less than 5% of the cost of rebore and new rings. Nothing like it ever before discovered. Thoroughly tested and proved in thousands of cars by certified laboratory tests and great Universities. The savings possible through this miner's discovery makes enthusiastic boosters of the most skeptical. Wide awake distributors and salesmen say it's the richest money making opportunity in years. Use the coupon and mail today!

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At a cost less than spark plugs and in only 30 minutes' time, you can place OVRHAUL in your cylinders and start reaping the benefits of this amazing invention. No special tools needed—no car tie-up—no danger of ruining your motor by reboring the cylinder walls.

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FOR SALESMEN AND DISTRIBUTORS WHO ACT QUICK!

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I built a sales organization that sold over a million automobile tires and tubes. I took untrained and trained men and taught them how to sell profitably. Ovrhaul in my judgment has greater possibilities than anything I have seen in the past 10 years. Join hands with me—a splendid business with quick profits should be yours. Start today by mailing the coupon for FREE SAMPLE.

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"We hereby certify that we have tested OVRHAUL UNDER WORKING CONDITIONS—1928 Pontiac driven 72,000 miles. TOTAL GAIN in compression 92 pounds (nearly normal according to manufacturer's specifications). OVRHAUL does NOT Scratch, abrade or otherwise injure the motor. The "pick-up" speed, and hill climbing performance were increased ENORMOUSLY. Car runs practically as well as when new."

Industrial Testing Laboratory, Inc.

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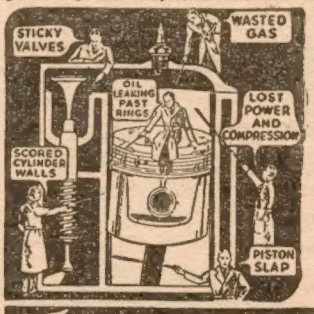

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If you would like to try this amazing mineral discovery without risk, use the coupon below or send a 1c POSTCARD for free sample and full details of a real money-making opportunity.

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INVENTOR

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It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

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Each month we receive scores of unsolicited letters of gratitude and appreciation from users of the Prosager—having thousands of users we no doubt can refer Prostate sufferers to someone in their own home town who is enthusiastic in their praise of the remarkable benefits received.

The following are extracts taken from letters of a few of the satisfied users of the "Prosager." The complete letters with addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them. We do not publish any part of our users' letters or names unless we have their permission to do so.

Mr. Wm. Bergin states in his letter: Received your Prosager a month ago and it has done wonders for me. Mr. R. M. Spencer, Waycross, Ga., writes: I still think the Prosager is wonderful and worth many times the price asked. Mr. Wm. Stevens, Flint, Mich., writes in his letter: Your Prosager should be in every man's home who has Prostate Trouble. Mr. Abram Forster, Pocatello, Idaho, states: I have given your Prosager plenty of use and am perfectly satisfied with results.

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*L. M. C., N. Y. C.

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Wouldn't Take $1000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.

*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.

*B. F., Bronx, N. Y.

Best Method by Far

Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best.

*A. O., Minn.

**Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.*

You, too, can play any instrument By this EASY A-B-C Method

YOU think it's difficult to learn music? That's what thousands of others have thought! Just like you, they longed to play some instrument—the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorites. But they denied themselves the pleasure — because they thought it took months and years of tedious study and practice to learn.

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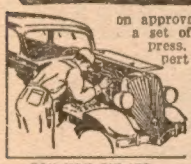

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29x4.50-20	2.35	.85	32x4	2.95	.85	34x4½	3.45	1.15
30x4.50-21	2.40	.85	33x4	2.95	.85	30x5	3.65	1.35
28x4.75-19	2.45	.95	34x4	3.25	.85	33x5	3.75	1.45
29x4.75-20	2.50	.95	32x4½	3.35	1.15	35x5	3.95	1.55
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05						
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05						
5.25-17	2.90	1.15						
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15						
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15						
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15						
31x5.25-21	2.95	1.15						
5.50-17	3.35	1.15						
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15						
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15						
6.00-17	3.40	1.15						
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15						
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15						
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.25						
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.25						
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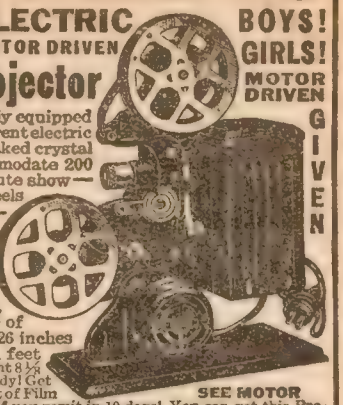

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Death's Too Good

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Author of "Frame For Dynamite," etc.

Lieutenant Ben Hagan tried to trap Granlund, the racket czar who had killed Detectives Pete and Aldo Correlli. And when Nita, vengeful sister of the dead Correlli brothers, started using her tiny pistol, she tangled Hagan's gunless strategy in a trigger giveaway.

CHAPTER I

NIGHT ALARM

SOMETHING oblong and heavy caromed off the wall, slithered onto a table in the darkness, hit glass with a resounding smack.

The noise snapped Hagan two-thirds of the way out of a dreamless sleep, brought him sitting straight up in bed.

He muttered, "What the hell?" in a sleep-choked voice and was swinging one big leg out of bed when another heavy, oblong object spun through the dim, gray square that was the open window, cracked him on the shoulder. The impact turned him half around, yanked him the rest of the way out of his stupor. He swore under his breath, flung back rumpled covers and hit the floor with his feet, fast but quietly.

His hand found his gun where he always left it, on the dresser top, and he bent his flat-bellied body half-double and stalked the misty square of the window. He got close to the window, slid one eye out beyond the window frame. Six feet below the window, on the lawn of the apartment house, there was a small, vague figure with a right arm poised.

The arm started to swing, and Hagan said: "You out there—freeze!"

A whisper floated up through the night from the small figure. The whisper said: "Ben! This is Nita—Nita Correlli!"

Hagan chuckled, let his gun hand sink. "Hi, Nita. Can't you think of anything

Nita stopped in the doorway, terrified.

else to do at this hour but toss rocks at me?"

"Let me in, Ben," the small figure said, still whispering. "I've got to see you. You've got to help me."

"Sure," Hagan said. "You can always see me. Come around front."

He snapped on lights, put his gun back on the dresser beside his watch, his keys, loose change and the shield that read, *Detective Lieutenant—Randburg Police Department.* He shrugged his six feet of ropy muscle into a warm, shabby bathrobe, his feet into slippers, and went out into the apartment-house hallway. He opened the night lock on the street door, and a small girl in good furs stepped inside.

The girl was slim, nicely rounded, with a creamy-skinned oval face, big brown eyes. The eyes were panicky.

She said, her breath coming fast: "Nobody answered the apartment-house phone, and the front door was locked, so I had to wake you."

Hagan grinned down at her, drew her inside. "You did, bambina, you did. That second rock left a two-inch dent in me. Now what's the matter?"

"It's Aldo. He's going to kill Granlund."

"Huhn?" Hagan said. "Somebody's been kidding you, honey—Granlund's not within a thousand miles of Randburg."

The girl stamped a small, well-shod foot. She said: "You know me well enough to realize I don't have hysterics for nothing. Granlund will be in town inside of half an hour, and Aldo's gone to meet him to kill him on sight. You're Aldo's partner, Ben, and you've got to stop him."

Hagan had a wide, bony face with jutting eyebrows, a rough-and-ready good humor in his blue eyes. He drew the eyebrows down into a straight line, said abruptly: "Come on in and tell me while I throw on some duds."

INSIDE his apartment he shut the door behind him, pulled out a chair and swung it around toward the wall.

"Sit down there and keep your back turned, bambina," he said, beginning to shuck the bathrobe. "Now shoot."

The girl sat down. She held one palm against the other to still the shaking of her hands. "I told you, Ben," she said. "Aldo's going to kill Granlund because he's sure Granlund is the man that murdered our brother, Pete, in that—"

"I know all that," Hagan said, grabbing up a shirt. "I'm sure Granlund murdered Pete Correlli, or had him murdered because Pete took the job as investigator for the grand jury and was rounding up some hot information on the rackets that would have busted them up and sent Granlund to the pen. And I know that while we couldn't get anything on Granlund to pin the murder on him, he thought it'd be smart to get out of town for a while and run his rackets by remote control. I've been over all that fifty times with Al."

"You know how Aldo felt about it, Ben."

"I know," Hagan said. "Sicilian stuff—you kill one Correlli and you've got the rest of them to kill before you can be comfortable again. But, after all, Al's a cop, and us cops can't afford to go in for personal feud stuff. I thought I had him talked out of it. What started him off again?"

Hagan was pulling on his shoes.

Nita Correlli said: "Somebody—a reporter, I think—called the house thirty minutes ago and talked to Al. He told Al that Granlund was getting in to Randburg on the air liner that gets in from the west at five-twenty, and wanted to know if Aldo planned to arrest him. I got that much from Aldo's end of the conversation. As soon as he hung up, Aldo got out his gun. As he was leaving the house, he said: 'Sis, things are about to get squared up.' I tried to keep him from going but he wouldn't listen to me."

"Damn all nosy reporters," Hagan said, jamming his hat on his sandy thatch, thrusting big fists through sleeves of a trench-coat. "And damn partners that every once in a while get a rush of hot blood to the head."

Nita Correlli got up. Her small, oval face was angry. She said: "If that's the way you feel—"

"Nuts, bambina," Hagan said. He grinned, chucked her under the chin. "Al Correlli and I have been partners for six years, and he's the best friend I've got in the world. But you've got to admit it's ga-ga for him to take things into his own hands. If he kills Granlund, he gets kicked off the cops, and a little later he gets burned for it. What percentage is there in that?"

"Then you'll stop him, Ben?"

"If I have to slug him unconscious. Come on."

They went out into the hall. On the wall near the street door there was a pay phone, and Hagan got out a nickel, dialed a number. He talked briefly, cradled the receiver and looked around at Nita Correlli.

"The airport says the eastbound liner is ten to fifteen minutes late," he said.

He looked at his watch. "It's five minutes of five, and we can get to the airport in twenty minutes, fast driving. We've got plenty of time. What I'll tell that nutty partner of mine about Latin impulses will give Mussolini indigestion."

Nita Correlli said softly, "Thank heaven for you, Ben!" She took one of his big-knuckled hands in hers, pressed her cheek against it impulsively.

"Well," Hagan said, grinning, "there're some Latin impulses that suit me."

CHAPTER II

Rescue for a Rat

HAGAN'S roadster rocked along at forty-five between factory buildings, half revealed in the dawn.

Over the slap of the wind, Nita Correlli said anxiously: "You're sure we'll be in time, Ben? Can't you go faster?"

"We'll make it," Hagan said. "It's only ten after five, and we've got less than two miles to go."

He swerved around a truck that labored with roaring motor, got clear of its bulk, the clamor of its engine.

Suddenly his foot jammed hard on his accelerator. He said between his teeth: "Hells bells!"

"What is it?"

"Listen!"

Above them the whine of a whirling propeller, the stuttering explosions of a half-throttled motor filled the air. A moment later a silvery shape, clear against the lightening sky, and five hundred feet above, slid beyond them and down an invisible runway toward the airport.

Hagan growled: "Hang on!"

The roadster hit seventy-five, eighty. The airliner dropped out of sight, and Hagan brought the speedometer needle up to eighty-five on a stretch of wide concrete that curved gently toward the airport entrance. He braked, tires shrieking, at the entrance, skidded to a jolting stop in front of the terminal building. He hit the sidewalk on the run almost before the car had stopped.

Through double doors of glass he could see the interior of the terminal. There was a clerk, yawning at the ticket window. In the center of the floor a red-capped negro stood, surrounded by half a dozen bags. There was no commotion, no disorder.

But Hagan saw that the red cap was staring in an uncertain way at the half-closed door of a small room at one side of the rotunda. Lettering on the door said TRAVEL BUREAU, and Hagan started, hard-heeled and in a hurry, toward the door. Behind him feet pattered.

Over his shoulder he flung: "Stay out from under my feet, bambina."

He got closer to the door, heard the mutter of a voice inside the room. Just outside the door and to one side, Hagan paused.

Inside, Correlli's voice snarled: "All right, Granlund, see if all your political angles will keep this slug out of your belly."

Another voice, thin and terrified, rose in a s c r e a m, chattered: "Correlli, don't—!"

Hagan's shoulder hit the half-open door, smashed it wide. Just inside, he spun and left his feet in a jump toward a short, dark-skinned man whose trigger finger was whitening with pressure on the trigger of the .38 that rested easily in his right hand.

Still in the air, Hagan yelled: "Al—wait!"

The dark-skinned man's face jerked around at him and the next instant Hagan slammed into him, jarred him off balance. The gun in his fist banged, and plaster spurted from the wall above a tall snappily-dressed man who stood, white and shaking, across from Correlli. Correlli went down, cursing, beneath Hagan, and Hagan got his hand on the gun, tore it out of Correlli's fingers.

"You crack-brain," Hagan growled. "Get sense, will you?"

There had been two men, big men with flat expressionless faces, standing beside the snappily-dressed man. One of them ran over to the pile-up, hauled a big foot back and kicked Correlli on the side of

the head. Correlli slumped, and the big man let another kick fly.

Hagan got the man's ankle halfway through the arc, pulled and twisted simultaneously, and the man flew into the air, lit on the back of his neck with a thud that shook the floor. Hagan got his knees and then his feet under him, scrambled upward.

The other big man roared: "Hey, you!" and started for Hagan, fists cocked professionally.

Hagan let the man's right slide over his shoulder, brought his own right up from his knees. It connected solidly with the angle of the man's jaw, bounced him against one wall. Ordinarily a solid right with Hagan's compliments was final, but the big man shoved himself away from the wall, shook his head and came boring in again, cursing.

ABOVE the uproar the snappily-dressed man clipped: "Pug—quit it!"

The big man stopped in mid-stride, turned his face around sulkily. He said: "Listen, boss, this mug pushed Nick around, didn't he? You wanta let him get away with that?"

"You fool, he just saved my life. Maybe yours."

Correlli swore groggily and sat up. Hagan looked down at him, back at the snappily-dressed man.

"Don't thank me, Granlund," he said. "I wouldn't have turned my head to keep your lousy hide in one piece. As a matter of fact, I think murder's too good for you, and I couldn't go for my partner sitting on the hot seat to even up for rubbing out a rat like you."

Pug scowled, made a move toward Hagan, and Granlund waved him back. Granlund had a thin, clever face with deep, narrowly-set, greenish eyes. His face was still perfectly white, and he shoved back a neat Homburg to pat sweat from his forehead with a crisp handkerchief. But he had his voice smooth and under control.

He shrugged. "Have it your way, Hagan. Nevertheless, I appreciate the way you handled that screw-ball partner of yours. He seems to think I know something about some brother of his getting killed. He's crazy."

Hagan scowled, said nothing. He reached down, got a hand under Correlli's armpit, hauled him up. He growled in Correlli's ear: "Nita's outside there. Go on out and take care of her, you hot-headed nut. I'll handle it from here on."

Correlli shook his head, looking at Granlund savagely, and Hagan put a hand in the middle of his back, shoved him out the door, through which Nita Correlli, a scared clerk and an even more scared porter were peering.

"Good enough," Granlund said. The big man whose name was Nick was stirring on the floor, and Granlund added: "Pug, slap that dim-wit back into circulation and we'll all get out of here."

Hagan shook his head. "You can go, Granlund. I've got nothing on you. But Pug and Nick go downtown with me."

"What for?"

"Assaulting an officer, interfering with an officer. I may be able to think of more later."

"Does it make any difference," Granlund said evenly, "that they're friends of mine?"

Hagan grinned. "All the difference in the world. Any friend of yours is a cinch to be sour. I've never seen these birds around Randburg before, and I want to find out who they are and just how sour they are."

Granlund's eyes narrowed. "You can't hold them, Hagan. You know I'll have 'em out half an hour after they hit jail."

"Sure," Hagan agreed cheerfully. "And meanwhile I'll have their prints to match with anything Washington has."

Pug scowled, his small eyes vicious at either side of a battered nose. He said: "Listen, boss, I thought you had something to say about things in this burg."

"Don't worry," Granlund said. His voice was cold. "Go on down with this pig-headed flatfoot. I'll jerk you out before they can get a cell unlocked for you. And, Hagan, you're sticking your neck out."

"That," Hagan said, "is my favorite exercise."

CHAPTER III

SUDDEN FUNERAL

CHIEF BAKER stuck out a fat hand, said: "Let me have your badge, Correlli."

Baker was a huge man with a paunch that matched all his other dimensions, a round, bland face with bunched gray hair above the ears and a wide pink area of scalp. Correlli's fine-boned, sensitive face with its straight-lipped mouth and brown eyes twitched a little, but he flipped back his lapel, unpinned the lieutenant's badge there.

Hagan stirred his big feet restlessly, said: "This isn't coming to Al, chief. I told you how it happened out there."

Baker took the badge, dropped it in a drawer of his desk. He said blandly: "You told me you and Correlli decided to work the airport this morning and saw a couple of suspicious characters come in on the liner with Granlund. So you decided to question them, and Correlli's gun went off accidentally. That's what you told me, and it was a lot of hooey. I found out from Granlund what happened. Correlli was all wet. If he has any proof that Granlund murdered Pete Correlli, the department will act on it as a department. I'll not have any of my men going off half-cocked on a personal feud."

Correlli's mobile Italian face tightened. He said behind his teeth: "Some time I'll prove Granlund killed my brother."

"I hope so," Baker said. "Meantime you're suspended until a trial board convenes. You'll be notified of the date."

In the corridor outside Baker's office, Hagan punched Correlli in the ribs, not hard, and grinned at him. "Cheer up, sour-puss. The worst you can get out of a trial board is a fifteen-day fine. Throwing the fear of hell into Granlund was worth that much, wasn't it?"

Correlli managed a smile, said: "You're a pretty swell guy, Ben. But I still wish I'd let Granlund have that slug."

"No, you don't."

Correlli shrugged. "No, I guess I don't. Like you say, I'd have burned for it; and the rat's not worth it."

"Right. Now go on home and eat spaghetti or find an early-morning movie or do something to get your mind off Granlund. Okay?"

"Okay, Ben."

From the steps of headquarters, Hagan watched his partner head across the street toward a parking lot. It was tough that that plane had been five minutes early instead of ten minutes late; because, Hagan knew, that build-up about a fifteen-day fine for firing that shot at Granlund had been just a build-up. Granlund's wires ran high up into the city administration. If he wanted to bear down, he could have Correlli thrown off the force; and, judging by the promptness with which he had filed charges against Correlli, he wanted to bear down.

Hagan saw Correlli's car pull out of the parking lot and he turned back into headquarters. He turned back just two seconds too soon to see another car, in which a pair of dapper and tight-lipped youths were riding, pull out in Correlli's wake.

As Hagan passed the desk sergeant's office, a grizzled sergeant in uniform poked his head out, said: "Hey, Ben, those two hooligans of yours were sprung on a writ an hour ago."

"I expected it," Hagan said. "I had 'em long enough to get what I wanted. The record bureau made one of them as Pug Williams, a St. Louis mobster, and the other as Nick De Mori, a petty racket chiseler from Chicago. But no wants on either of 'em."

At nine o'clock that night Hagan rang the doorbell of the second-floor flat where Al and Nita Correlli lived. Nita answered the door.

"Hi, bambina," Hagan said. "Al home?"

Nita Correlli's pretty face was shadowed, worried. She batted her big brown eyes at Hagan, said uneasily: "I—I thought you were with him, Ben. He hasn't been home all day; he hasn't called up or anything."

Hagan made his voice and his face casual. He said: "I was working a different case from him today. He'll be showing up pretty quick, I guess. I'll wait around for him a little."

INSIDE the living room he picked up the phone, said carelessly: "I'd better make my final check-in. Could you fix me a cup of coffee?"

Nita said: "Of course, Ben. Right away."

She went through a hallway to the kitchen, and Hagan dialed, got the police department operator and asked for the homicide squad.

When the homicide squad answered, Hagan said in a low voice: "Levine? Hagan, Levine. Heard anything from or of Al Cor—"

Levine's voice cut in, heavy and excited, making the phone squawk at Hagan's ear. "For heaven's sake, Ben, I been trying to locate you for twenty minutes. Al was found shot to death half an hour ago out on City Dump Number Four."

Hagan's teeth set suddenly, involuntarily. Through them he said in a voice that wasn't his own: "What? Who did it?"

Behind Hagan china crashed unnoticed to the floor while Levine's voice kept biting at his eardrum. "Not much dope on it yet, Ben. Couple of boys found him and notified the watchman. I understand he hadn't been dead very long. You better get out there right away—maybe you can help."

"Yeah," Hagan said. "Sure."

He cradled the phone, turned. Nita Correlli stood in the middle of the room. Coffee stained the rug in a litter of broken china at her feet. Her face was white and terrified, and her eyes pleaded with Hagan.

In a voice that barely got past her pale lips she said: "He's dead! They've killed him, haven't they?"

Hagan put an arm around her shoulders, held her tight when her slim body began quivering. He said: "Show me how well you can take it, bambina. Come on, show me."

"He's dead, isn't he?"

"Yes."

The girl went to pieces against Hagan's wide chest. He let her weep and storm for five minutes, then he held her away from him, shook her a little. He said harshly: "Get hold of yourself, Nita. You've got to. I can't leave until you do, and I've got to get out there."

She clenched her hands, bit her lips, began to stifle her sobs. Through them she said bitterly: "Oh, if I had only let him go ahead and kill Granlund last night! At least Aldo would still have been alive. Ben, I will kill Granlund myself! I swear to you I will kill him myself!"

"No, you won't," Hagan said. "If and when we get around to that, I'll take care of it, myself."

"You?"

"Me," Hagan said. "Al might have been your brother. He was my partner. I'll take care of his debts."

She broke down again, sobbing. "First Pete, now Aldo! I will kill that Granlund, myself!"

"Will you promise me one thing?"

"What?"

"Will you stay here until I get back?" She nodded faintly, and Hagan said again: "Will you? I don't want you going Sicilian on me and starting out after Granlund with a rod in your kick. Because you won't get any place that way. Will you give me your word?"

"I will give you my word."

"Okay." He held her racked form closely for a moment, said: "I'm sorry, bambina."

CHAPTER IV

Cover Charge Clue

CAPTAIN GILLIS, homicide skipper, looked down at Al Correlli's body in the glow of a half-dozen flashlights and teetered from heel to toe and back again. He said to Hagan, who had just arrived:

"Was shot some place else, Ben, and dumped here. It must have been some place close because he hasn't been dead over an hour."

Hagan, looking down at the body also, felt faintly sick at the pit of his stomach, felt in addition to that a cold lump of resolve in his chest. He had been partners with Al Correlli for six years. They'd been more than partners; they'd

been friends. Straight-lipped, straight-shooting Correlli had saved his life at least twice. Once Hagan had stood off a gang of hijackers in the old days for half an hour with Correlli unconscious at his feet. They hadn't talked much about those things between themselves, but neither had forgotten them.

And now Correlli lay on his face in a pile of refuse, a bullet through the back of his head, half the front of his skull gone.

Under his breath Hagan said: "Okay, Al, we're still partners."

"What's that, Hagan?" Gillis said.

"Just something," Hagan told him, "between pals, skipper."

Gillis cleared his throat, said: "I'm sorry, Ben. I know you and Al were partners a long time. So I thought maybe you'd have an idea on this."

"I have an idea," Hagan said. "It'll probably turn out to be a lousy idea."

"Lousy or not, what is it?"

"Al had Charlie Granlund believing this morning he was going to put a slug through him. So Granlund turns him in to Chief Baker and gets him a suspension and a trial board."

"Yeah," Gillis nodded. "I heard a little something about that. But it looks like that ought to work the other way around. Al would have done the blasting, and Granlund would have been the victim."

Hagan shrugged. "I said it was probably a lousy idea."

"Well, we'll talk to Granlund."

Two coroner's deputies with a stretcher picked their way across the dump toward the clump of flashlights. They put Al Correlli's body on the stretcher and started back. Hagan walked back to the road beside Gillis.

He said: "Skipper, if you don't mind I'd like to be assigned to find Granlund and bring him in for a talk."

Gillis looked at him sidewise, shrewdly, for a moment. "All right, Ben," he nodded. "But no rough stuff, you understand."

"I'm no nitwit," Hagan said dryly. "I know how Granlund stands. But I'd like to be the first to talk to him about this."

The Swing Club, latest and hottest hotcha spot of Randburg, lay behind a port-holed, modernistic front, liberally adorned with neon tubes. Hagan, half an hour after he had left City Dump Number Four, pulled his roadster in to the curb across from the club, got out, and crossed the street. The doorman, tall and with gray, handlebar mustaches, touched his gilt-braided cap.

"And how are you tonight, Mr. Hagan?" he said.

"I'm all right, Mike."

Mike grinned under the mustaches. "I seen your partner a while ago."

Hagan, already halfway through the leather-padded doors of the Swing Club, came back. "How long ago, Mike?"

"Two-three hours ago."

"Anybody with him?"

"No, sir, Mr. Hagan, but he had a very nice package aboard. He sang me one of them Eye-talian operas for five minutes before I could get him into a cab."

"A cab, huh?" Hagan said. "Remember the driver?"

"No, sir. He wasn't one of the regulars on this stand. Maybe I could find out, though."

Hagan said: "Find out in a hurry, Mike, and let me know."

"Anything the matter, Mr. Hagan?"

"Enough," Hagan nodded. "Correlli was murdered about an hour and a half ago, and his body thrown on a city dump."

Mike's face was shocked and incredulous. "And that's a shame, Mr. Hagan! A fine fellow Mr. Correlli was. Yes, sir, I'll find out who hauled him away from here, and I'll let you know immediate."

"Thanks, Mike."

Hagan went through the leather-padded doors, down three steps and past a tall blonde without paying any attention to the hand she stretched out for his hat. Inside the club the lights were dimmed, all except an amber spot that played on a lithe brunette who was halfway through a strip-tease act in the middle of the dance floor. Out of the shadowy clutter of tables and diners, a short, tuxedoed man came toward Hagan.

He murmured: "Table, sir?"

"No table, Gino. Just a little conversation."

Gino Perrino said: "Oh, hello, Ben. How are you? What can I do for you?"

"What I said—a little conversation. Your office empty?"

"Sure," Perrino said. "This way."

THEY went past a dais where Jimmy Hixon's Swingers were racketing, down a hallway and into a small room, cluttered with files, a desk, a safe. Perrino was a stocky, swart man with a good-looking face, quiet and wary eyes. He smiled a little, said: "Converse, Ben."

Hagan sat on a corner of the desk, got a cigarette lit. He said conversationally: "Where can I find Granlund, Gino?"

Perrino shook his head. "I don't know."

"You don't know, or you won't tell me?"

"I don't know, Ben," Perrino said patiently.

Hagan scowled. "Nuts, Gino. Granlund owns this spot, and you're his manager, and you expect me to believe you don't know where he can be contacted?"

"He used to live at the Western Arms Hotel—"

"I know, I know," Hagan interrupted. "And the Western Arms was torn down while he was out of town. Listen, Gino, I played ball with you a couple of times when a mob tried to frame you. Now it's your turn. Right now, if I want to, I can have the vice squad raise hell with you on that strip-tease act out there. I know a lot of ways to make you uneasy if you want to have it that way."

Perrino hesitated. Then he shrugged, said: "I guess Granlund can take care of himself if he has to. I'm sending my daily report sheet to the A-B-C Investment Company, seven-fifty Charter Building."

"But you don't know where he's living since he got back?"

"I swear I don't, Ben."

"Okay." Hagan nodded. He snapped his cigarette at a cuspidor and stood up. "One more thing—Al Correlli was in here earlier tonight."

"I talked to him a little while. He was pretty high, too high."

"What do you mean by that?"

Perrino looked faintly uneasy. He said: "Listen, Ben, any guy in this town, copper or not, who runs around shooting off his face how Granlund is a heel, a punk, a louse and a yellow rat, is laying up trouble for himself. Al was in here—Granlund's own spot—telling anybody that'd listen all those things. You're smart, Ben. You know Granlund can't pass over things like that and still manage to keep all his boys in line. I finally shut Al up and got him to leave."

"Alone?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Because he didn't stay alone very long. Somebody caught up with him not very long after he left here, put a slug through the back of his nut and tossed him on a city dump."

Perrino paled. "No!"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, Ben. Al was always a good friend of mine."

"Yeah," Hagan said. "I'm sorry, too. He was a good partner of mine."

Perrino chewed at his upper lip in a worried way. His eyes fell away from Hagan's. He muttered: "If I'd known—"

"I know," Hagan said. "If you'd known Al had been bumped off, you wouldn't have cracked about the A-B-C Investment Company."

"You didn't get that dope from me, Ben," Perrino said.

Hagan's eyes bored. "Then you think Granlund was behind this?"

"Me, I'm not thinking," Perrino muttered. "If you're going to push Granlund around, I don't want him getting the idea I've got anything to do with it. I'm not telling you anything when I say he's bad medicine if he doesn't like somebody."

"All right," Hagan said. "I got my information out of the air."

"And go out the back way, Ben," Perrino pleaded. "I hope to hell nobody saw me bring you in here. That's all I hope."

He let Hagan out a rear door into the darkness of an alley, and Hagan went down the alley, down to the street corner and across to his car. Three blocks away he pulled up in front of a drug store and found a phone booth inside.

The number he dialed was that of Nita Correlli, and after a little her voice said: "Hello."

"Ben," Hagan said. "Are you okay, bambina?"

"I'm all right, Ben." Her voice was dull, without life. But it was calm. "Ben, tell me—about Aldo. Was it—was it bad?"

"He died between seconds," Hagan said. "That's a little comfort."

"Granlund's behind it, isn't he?"

"I think so. I don't know. I'm working on it."

"What can I do? I've got to do something to even up for Aldo or go crazy, Ben."

"Sit tight," Hagan said. He thrust out his lower lip, scowled in thought for a moment. "Here's something you can do. Al at one time or another probably told you how to look for fingerprints. Scout around your apartment and see if you can find something you know has a set of his on it. I may be able to do something with them. Of course, I can get them from the files in the morning when the personnel bureau opens, but they might do me some good before then."

"Will you be by for them?"

"After a while. First I want to crack down on a spot at seven-fifty Charter Building where Granlund does some business. Meanwhile, keep your brakes on."

"I will, Ben."

"You've got what it takes, bambina."

CHAPTER V

Seventh Hell

THE CHARTER BUILDING was an elderly pile of gray limestone, drab from twenty years of Randburg smoke and soot. It stood in the older part of the business section with cheap stores and dingy loft buildings huddled at the foot of its eight-story bulk. Twenty minutes after Hagan had talked to Nita Correlli, he parked his roadster around the corner from the building in a badly-lit side street, got out and stretched his long legs toward the entrance.

The lobby doors were unlocked, and inside, a gnarled, dyspeptic-looking man was reading a newspaper in a chair under a naked bulb that shot hard light on the narrow floor of veined marble, a flight of worn marble stairs, the grille-work of an old-fashioned elevator.

Hagan said: "Hi, pop."

The gnarled man put his paper down, looked at Hagan peevishly over his silver-rimmed spectacles. "What do you want? And I'm not your pop."

"That's the first break I've had tonight," Hagan said. He grinned a little, flipped back his lapel.

"Why didn't you say you were a copper. Even so, what d'you want?"

"For a man that's not going to get answers, you ask a lot of questions," Hagan said, losing his grin. "Get out of that chair and take me up to seven."

The gnarled man put his paper down slowly, irritably, but he got up, opened the elevator door and waited for Hagan to follow him.

At seven the corridor was dark except for a square of yellow light at a door halfway down to the rear of the building. The gnarled man, when the elevator had stopped bouncing and he had the grille open, reached his hand out toward a switch on the wall.

Hagan batted the hand down, said: "Skip it, pop."

He walked fast and quietly toward the square of yellow light.

The gnarled man watched him for a moment, then stepped back into the cage and dropped it out of sight in a hurry.

Hagan paused in front of the door, listened for a second to a murmur of voices inside and shifted his gun from his shoulder holster to his coat pocket. He tried the doorknob very softly. The catch freed itself and the door moved forward a fraction of an inch under his hand. The next second he had kicked it open, was standing in the doorway looking at three men who sat playing cards at a desk in the center of the office.

Two of them were Pug Williams and Nick De Mori. The third man was undersized, very young, with a thin and perfectly white face and shiny-black eyes in which the pupils had shrunk to pinpoints.

Hagan said dryly: "Surprise, boys."

The undersized man put down his cards slowly, but he got up fast. He had been sitting nearest the door, and when he was on his feet, he squared around, said: "Who are you, wise guy?"

"Sit down, half-pint," Hagan growled. He moved forward, and the undersized man suddenly was galvanized into split-second action. A sap dropped out of his sleeve into his right hand, swung at Hagan.

Hagan stopped the leather with the palm of his left hand; pain whipped to his elbow from the impact. His right hand came off his gun, out of his pocket. He closed the hand over the face of the undersized man, grunted and shoved. The undersized man went off his feet, sailed over a corner of the desk and crashed into a steel file. He slid to the floor, where he lay still.

"Who's your ambitious little pal?" Hagan said.

Nick De Mori had a wide, dark face. It was respectful when he looked at Hagan; his voice was earnest. He said: "You shouldn't have done that, Hagan. That little guy is a very bad citizen."

"Bad," Hagan grunted, "when he's needled up. Who is he?"

Pug Williams shrugged. "Find out, shamus. And what's the idea of busting in here?"

"I'm looking for your boss, that's all."

"He ain't here."

"So I see," Hagan said. He looked around the room, saw it was a single office, containing only the big desk, a few chairs and a dozen big steel filing cabinets. "I haven't got anything else to do. I'll wait for him."

De Mori shrugged. "Go ahead. I guess we can stand your company."

Hagan bared his teeth in a humorless grin. "Then I must be slipping. Anyway, I can't stand yours."

While the two big men watched him with narrowed eyes, Hagan walked around the desk and picked up the phone, started to dial. His hands were busy with the dial, when there was a scuffling noise behind him. He swiveled his head in a hurry, saw the undersized man already on his feet by the files. The man's face was no longer white. It was suffused with red at the sharp cheekbones. He was clutching a gun that looked two sizes too big for his hand.

"So, wise guy," he snarled, his pupils mere flecks in the black murderousness of his eyes, "you bounce me around, do you? You had a lot of fun, huhn? I wanta see you laugh when you get this in the guts."

Hagan didn't move. He could read unreasoning fury in the undersized man's eyes, knew the man was hopped to the

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eyebrows and that the slightest motion would set him off like a pack of firecrackers. Hagan cursed himself silently for not having shaken the man down for a gun. The only excuse he had was that, lying on the floor, the undersized man had seemed dead to the world.

De Mori and Williams didn't move, either.

De Mori said in a cajoling voice: "Eddie, listen, this guy is a cop. Put that gun away on account of you'll just jam us up."

THERE was a flicker of interest in the beady eyes but no change in their clear intention.

"What if he is a cop? He wears pants like anybody else and he can't shove me in the face. Anyway, I like to kill cops. Go ahead, flattie, move just once. I'm going to put a slug in you the first time you twitch."

Hagan kept his body still, his eyes on the shiny black ones. Sweat popped out on his forehead, began to dribble down the channel of his spine. He knew the glare of death when he saw it. De Mori began to say something.

"Shut up," Eddie snarled, lips drawing back from his teeth. "You're not going to move, huhn, copper. Okay, take it anyway."

His right hand began to contract, to squeeze. Hagan loosened the muscles in his knees, tried to time his sidewise jump with the final contraction of Eddie's trigger finger. His throat was dry, his teeth were gritting. There wasn't a chance and he knew it, but he had to make a try just the same.

A gun, a small gun, banged some place, and Hagan jerked his body to one side. The noise of the small gun was swallowed up instantly in the roar of the automatic in Eddie's fist. Hagan went down on one knee, knowing he hadn't been hit but not knowing why. Eddie's automatic bounced on the floor in front of him, and he grabbed it, snapped to his feet again.

Eddie was standing against the files, his left hand holding the shoulder muscles of his right arm. He was sobbing and shaking and cursing luridly, all at once, and he seemed to have forgotten Hagan. De Mori and Williams looked at Hagan stupidly. Neither of them had a gun in his hand; neither could have fired that first shot.

Hagan swept sweat off his forehead with his fingers, said: "Where'd that shot come from?"

Williams shook his ring-battered head at Hagan, but De Mori said: "I don't know—I think it was the hall, Hagan. I think it was out there, maybe."

Hagan backed through the open door, keeping his eyes on the three men. Outside he jerked his glance sideways down the dark corridor but saw no one, heard nothing. He came back into the room. The first thing he did was to fan Eddie thoroughly. He found a knife, one more gun, a belly gun, stuck inside the man's belt. He saw that a bullet had sliced through Eddie's right sleeve just below the shoulder, deep enough to burn across the muscle, not deep enough to be more than a scratch. He knew if it hadn't been for that slug, he would have been dead at that very moment, himself. And he had ideas about where the bullet had come from.

Eddie had stopped sobbing and shaking, but he kept on cursing.

Hagan said: "Shut up, punk, or I'll fill your throat with teeth."

Eddie shut up and Hagan shook De Mori and Williams down in a hurry. Neither had any weapons.

Taking up the phone again, Hagan said: "I still don't like your company. I'm going to give you a nice ride in the wagon."

He was starting to dial when he heard the elevator whine to a stop down the corridor, heard the door bang open. A moment later feet hurried down the hall, and the dapper figure of Charlie Granlund appeared in the doorway. Behind him towered Chief of Detectives Baker.

His greenish eyes were cold, Granlund stepped in and surveyed the bullet-scarred file beside the undersized man and the bullet hole in the desk where Eddie's slug had landed.

"The watchman notified me some dumb flatfoot had crashed his way in here," he said in a chill, even voice. "I thought it

was probably you, Hagan, so I got hold of Baker, who has a few things to say to you. How about it, chief?"

Baker flushed a little at Granlund's proprietary air but he stepped around the racket leader and glared at Hagan.

"What's the idea of this, Hagan?" he snapped.

Hagan shrugged, put the phone down. He said: "Captain Gillis assigned me to find Granlund and bring him in for questioning on the murder of Correlli. I found out he did business out of this place, so I came here. The squirt there swung a sap at me when I walked in, so I knocked him cold. When he came to he tried to shoot me—"

"You lie like hell, shamus," Eddie snarled. "You came in here waving a rod. How was I to know you were a copper? So I went for my rod, and some pal of yours outside the door let me have it."

"One way or the other," Hagan growled, "you're coming downtown with me on a charge of carrying concealed weapons."

"Yeah?" the undersized man gloated. "I got a permit for this rod. Laugh that off."

Baker said: "Hagan, come outside. I want to talk to you."

As Hagan passed him, Granlund lifted one corner of his thin lips in a supercilious smile. The two big men chuckled, and Hagan went through the door with the back of his neck red, anger making his eyes narrow. Baker walked him down the hall twenty feet.

"What went on in there?" Baker said.

"Just what I told you, chief."

"Who fired the shot?"

Hagan shook his head. "That's as much of a mystery to me as it was a surprise to the squirt. But if it hadn't been fired, you'd have had one more dead copper on your hands, chief."

BAKER deliberated. Finally he said: "All right, Hagan, I'll accept your explanation of it and take no disciplinary action. I think I can get Granlund to overlook it."

"Huhn?" Hagan ejaculated. "Get Granlund to overlook it? Listen, chief, do you mean you're not going to drag these rats down to the bureau and put them over the hurdles about Al Correlli's murder?"

"That's exactly what I mean," Baker snapped. "While you've been waltzing around, going off half-cocked on a personal grudge against Granlund, the rest of the boys have been working. We've got Correlli's murder solved and we have the man in cutody, together with all the evidence we need against him. Granlund had nothing to do with it."

Hagan was too amazed to say anything.

"We found out," Baker said, "that Correlli had been going from bar to bar all afternoon, getting drunk. An hour ago we got a call that a drunken truckster had driven his light delivery truck off the road into a telephone pole, and when they brought him in to the emergency hospital with a broken jaw and a fractured skull, Correlli's watch and pocketbook were found on him. When the truck was checked the boys found a mess of blood in the back of it, along with a piece of cloth that had been torn from Correlli's trousers. It's a dead-bang case against the truckster if he lives. He ran onto Correlli some place, shot him, robbed him and threw his body into the truck to take it out to the dump. That's all there is to it."

Hagan shook his head. "Listen, chief, if Al was so drunk this truck driver could rob him, there wouldn't have been any need to shoot him, particularly to shoot him through the back of the head. Granlund was behind this and, by hell, I won't stop until I prove it and send him where he belongs—to the hot seat."

"This is pretty close to insubordination, Hagan."

"To hell with insubordination!"

Baker nodded, put one of his big hands on Hagan's shoulder. He said: "I know how you feel. Correlli was your partner and your friend. I'll forget what you've just said. Go home, cool off, and things will look different in the morning."

Hagan said nothing, looked stubborn. Baker, after a moment, sighed wearily and went back to the lighted office. Hagan went down the stairs, slowly at first and then faster. He was burning—any copper

with half the intelligence of a moron could smell the frame-up in the solution that had practically been tossed into the lap of the homicide squad.

When Hagan walked out through the lobby, the gnarled man threw him a look of vindictive satisfaction and went back to his paper. It added further steam to the pressure generating inside Hagan, and he slapped the doors out of his way with a bang, went hard-heeled down the sidewalk toward the corner. He found his roadster around the corner, started to climb in, then stepped back when somebody moved inside.

Nita Correlli said: "Ben—"

"You!"

"Me," Nita said.

Hagan climbed in, looked down at her, nodded his head. "Things begin to clear up. You took that pot-shot at the half-pint guy."

"I thought it was about time somebody got you out of that jam."

"You win," Hagan said. "You were an idiot to come trailing around after me, but it's lucky you did."

"I was going almost crazy sitting around, Ben. It was silly, maybe, but I thought if I could just see Granlund and threaten to do what Aldo almost did at the airport, he might be scared enough to confess."

"A screwy idea, bambina."

"I know, but I had to do something. And then I'd found Aldo's prints—left and right hands—all over his military hairbrushes and I thought you might want them right away. I took a cab down, and you were just going into the building as I got here. When I got inside, you'd gone up in the elevator, so I went up the stairs and heard that little man threatening you as I got to the seventh floor. I had the twenty-five revolver Aldo gave me in my bag, so I—I—"

"So you saved my life."

"I heard the elevator starting up, so I ran down one flight and waited. When I saw it was Chief Baker, I went on down and waited for you here. Have they arrested Granlund and those men?"

Hagan snorted. "They're not going to arrest them, bambina. They've got Al's murder all nicely framed around some poor truck driver."

He told her about it, and in the dim light from a street lamp down at the corner, saw her eyes widen with anger and horror.

He said: "I feel the same way."

"But what are we going to do? Let Granlund get away with that? Let him send an innocent man to the chair? Ben, if you don't do something, I swear by the blood of my two brothers I'll kill Granlund myself."

"There you go," Hagan said. "Going Sicilian on me again. If Al hadn't pulled the same thing, he'd still be alive. You've got to remember the law's very fussy about even a mugg like Granlund being bumped off. What we've got to do is get the goods on him, bambina, and send him to the chair. Murder's too good for him, anyway. It's too quick. What I want to do is sit around outside while Granlund sits behind bars waiting for that last morning to come."

"What are you going to do, though?"

"Right now," Hagan said, "I'm going to go places and talk to people. And you're going back home in a cab, where I hope to heaven you'll stay put for a while." He grinned a little. "I'll try to stay out of jams where I'd need the backing of that popgun of yours. Where're the brushes?"

CHAPTER VI

Death Delayed

THE SWING CLUB was really beginning to warm up when Hagan parked his car across from the port-holed front again. Cabs and private cars were arriving with after-the-theater parties, and it was ten minutes before Hagan, lounging down the street from the entrance, saw his chance to speak quietly to the doorman with the handlebar mustaches.

"Anything, Mike?" he said.

Mike said aloud: "Not a thing, Mr. Hagan."

Hagan scowled.

Mike let his eyes rove around, saw there was no one within ten feet. From the cor-

ner of his mouth and under his breath he said: "The hacker in the fourth cab on the stand."

Hagan made his face look disgruntled and went across to his car. He kept his eyes on the fourth cab on the stand, saw it advance, cab by cab, to the lead-off position. When it pulled out with two couples as fares, he got his roadster started and dawdled along behind the cab until the wares were dropped in front of a downtown hotel. The hacker made a U-turn, got in line on the hotel stand, and Hagan parked his car across the street.

The hacker looked startled when Hagan climbed inside the cab. Hagan palmed his badge at the man.

"A little information," Hagan said.

The cab driver looked relieved. He said: "Sure, boss."

"You picked up a fare at the Swing Club about seven o'clock, didn't you?"

The hacker nodded. "Sure, I remember him. Kind of a dark-looking guy. He was singing opera stuff. Pretty well lit."

"Where'd you take him?"

"A joint over on Fifth Street—the Blue Hour Inn."

"Okay," Hagan said, beginning to climb out.

"Is that all, boss?"

"That's all," Hagan said, "except one thing: Don't tell anybody a copper was asking you about it. It wouldn't be healthy."

The driver, who was young and had a weak, good-looking face, nodded violently. "I never even saw you, boss."

Back in his own car Hagan put down in his notebook under the dashlight the name and number of the chauffeur's license he had seen on the identification card in the tonneau of the cab. He knew if he had done that while the hacker was watching him, there would probably have been one hacker gone south by morning.

Ten minutes later Hagan was pulling in to the curb at Fifth Street, half a block below blue neon tubes that spelled out "Blue Hour Inn." He went inside, through a long, narrow dining room that was weirdly illuminated with blue lamps, and on into a long, narrow bar that was bright and crowded. Hagan nudged himself up to the bar between a well-curved blonde in pink satin and a slinky brunette in green chiffon.

The blonde hiccoughed, smiled coyly up at Hagan and said: "Hi, big boy."

Hagan said, "Hi, big girl," and ignored her.

The blonde gave Hagan a dirty look and then snapped her fingers at a bartender sliding past. "Hey, you, where's my Pink Lady?"

The bartender, who was a dried-up looking man with one lock of oiled hair drawn across his baldness, said irritably: "In a minute, lady, in a minute."

He saw Hagan and stopped. "Hello, Ben. H'are you? What'll it be?"

"Whiskey sour, Joe." Under cover of the noises all around him, Hagan added: "I want to talk to you."

"Okay, Ben."

Hagan let his whiskey sour slide down, waited. After five minutes he saw Joe wipe his hands on his bar apron and head down the bar, out and along a narrow corridor. He followed and found the dried-up man waiting for him in the men's lounge.

"How's tricks, Ben?"

Hagan said: "They could be better."

"With me, too," Joe sighed. "The way these dames are tanking up and having the screaming mee-mees in respectable bars these days is enough to drive a guy nuts. Speaking of getting tanked, I seen your partner, Al Correlli, in here tonight."

"That's what I wanted to talk about. When was he here? How long did he stay?"

"He was in here a little after seven. I didn't notice him leaving, but he couldn't have been here very long."

"Anybody with him?"

"Nope."

Hagan scowled. The trail he had hoped to follow was vanishing almost before he had started on it. He said, purely as a shot in the dark: "Did you notice anything unusual in here around the time you saw Al?"

"Come to think of it," Joe said, "there was something. You know this guy, Jerry Macintosh, the fight manager?"

"I know him."

"He does a lot of his drinking in here. He was here tonight pretty well organized and he swore he'd seen a couple of muggs snatch another guy out of the washroom here. Everybody knows Jerry is a hell of a liar, even when he's sober, and he was so lit nobody paid any attention to him. There wasn't any uproar back there, and nobody had went off without settling his check, so I figured Jerry'd been seeing things again."

Hagan had started toward the door. He said: "Jerry lives over at the Acropolis Hotel, doesn't he?"

"Hey, wait a minute," Joe said. "Here's something else I just remembered. Just a while ago some young fellow came in and talked to Billy Herbert, the manager. I heard the guy describing Jerry and asking who he was and where did he live. I didn't think nothing about it because Jerry always has a block of stumblebums at his heels."

Hagan said, "Thanks, Joe," and was gone.

THE ACROPOLIS HOTEL, a cheap and shabby pile of yellow brick, was fifteen blocks away. Hagan made it in a little more than five minutes, sailing through traffic with his horn blaring, cursing at street cars, automobiles, hapless pedestrians. He skidded to a fast stop in front of the Acropolis, hit the sidewalk and the door fast and barged into the lobby.

A sleepy clerk at the desk looked up, uninterested.

Hagan snapped: "What room's Jerry Macintosh in?"

"What's your rush, mister?" the clerk yawned.

"They'll be rushing you to a hospital if you don't snap out of it," Hagan clipped. "What room?"

"Four-eighteen."

"Is he up there?"

"He's up there," the clerk grumbled. "What's he got on up there, a convention? Two other guys just—"

Hagan didn't hear any more because he was heading for the elevator. The elevator wasn't at the lobby level, so Hagan went for the stairway, took the steps three at a time. At the second floor he hauled his gun out of his shoulder holster, held it ready in his right hand. When he hit the fourth floor, he was winded and he stopped at the head of the stairs to listen and get some breath.

The fourth-floor corridor was quiet, lit dimly by one bulb of very low wattage. Numerals on the doors near Hagan indicated four-eighteen would be near the rear of the building. He went down the corridor noiselessly until he found himself in front of four-eighteen. A light showed through the transom above the door, and beyond the thin pine panels, voices rumbled.

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Hagan put an ear to the door. He could distinguish that at least two men were talking on the other side of the door. After that he didn't waste any time. He didn't know whether the door was locked or not and didn't care; he could see that it was flimsy and that the lock and the catch were of the shoddiest type.

He stood back, raised himself on one toe and drove his other big foot, heel up, against the lock. Wood crackled and splintered, screws shrieked as they came loose and the door burst inward. Hagan let the impetus of his kick carry him through the doorway. He stopped with a jolt that shook the room, stood spread-legged and poised with his eyes and his gun swiveling.

Jerry Mackintosh, a little, red-faced man, who had been sitting on the bed, screeched and fell over backwards. Two other men had been standing over him, covering him with guns, which were still pointed at him as Hagan jarred to a stop.

One of the men was Eddie, who held his gun awkwardly in his left hand. The other one was a slim, blond boy with very pale-gray eyes and a sullen mouth. They started to swing around toward Hagan, their faces ludicrous with surprise and alarm.

"Hold it," Hagan barked.

They held it, and Hagan grinned.

He said: "Fancy meeting you here, Eddie. I'll bet this is one caper that'll get you so tight in the jailhouse that Granlund won't be able to spring you. Drop those rods."

As he spoke, Mackintosh screeched again, jumped up and ran toward Hagan, still screeching.

He yelled: "Save me! Save me! They're gonna kill me!"

"Stay back," Hagan bawled. "Stay back, you damn fool."

Instead Mackintosh came straight at him. Hagan dodged to one side, tried to avoid him, and the man changed direction with him. He got between Hagan and Eddie, and Hagan saw Eddie's feet shifting, bringing him around. By that time the red-faced man was virtually climbing up Hagan's vest, and Hagan, cursing, stiff-armed him. He went down between Hagan's legs, tripped him.

Hagan was just starting to fall when the gun in Eddie's left hand whammed twice in the small room. Whether it was the awkwardness of using his left hand or whether it was in the hurry, both bullets smacked the wall a foot from Hagan's head, and Eddie ran for the door as Hagan, on the floor by that time, worked his gun hand out of the tangle. The slim blond boy hadn't fired a shot, and when he saw Hagan's gun starting up, he, too, broke for the door.

Hagan managed to snap one shot in the general direction of the blond boy's back as it went through the door. He knew he had missed.

. He swore savagely, heaved up off the floor and reached a hand down to pluck Mackintosh upward.

Mackintosh clung to him, whinnying thanks.

"Thank heaven you came, Hagan," he gurgled. "You're Lieutenant Hagan, ain't you? If you hadn't showed up, Hagan, they'd of killed me. They were gonna kill me. One of 'em wanted to kill me here, and the other wanted to take me for a ride. You saved my life, Hagan."

"And you," Hagan clipped, "damn near lost both our lives. Sit down."

Mackintosh's breath smelled strongly of alcohol, but he was probably as close to being sober as he had been in years. He sat down on the bed, looked sheepish. He said: "I'm sorry I lost my head, Hagan. The only thing I could think of when I saw you was to have you take me away from those guys."

Hagan still looked mad, but he said quietly: "All right, all right, Jerry. Now tell me what it was all about."

"They were the same two muggs I saw snatch a guy over at the Blue Hour."

"How'd you happen to see them?"

"I went back to the men's room, and just as I stepped into the hallway, I saw this pair walking a fellow out between them. They both had guns in his back. Maybe I made a noise or something, because just as they got to the back door, they both looked over their shoulders at

me. They went on out without saying anything to me, though."

"Who was the man who was being snatched?"

"I couldn't tell. I only saw his back."

"These birds say anything that you could hear?"

"Uh-huh. One of them said something about going out to the big fellow's joint."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"And why," Hagan said, "didn't you call the cops?"

Mackintosh shrugged. "I was kind of liquored, and the other guys there laughed at me. I figured maybe I had been seeing things."

"If you saw these guys again," Hagan asked, "could you identify them as the pair you saw at the Blue Hour, and here?"

Mackintosh shivered. "I'd know those guys if I met 'em in a pea-soup fog at midnight."

"Good," Hagan said.

"Don't leave me, Hagan," Mackintosh pleaded.

"Don't worry. I'd rather lose my right eye than lose you right now."

The noise of a siren from far off penetrated the room, began to grow louder.

"Come on," Hagan snapped. "I haven't got time to stick around and tell some dumb radio cops what this is all about. Come on!"

CHAPTER VII

Luger Bargain

IT was nearing one o'clock when Hagan put his roadster in the parking lot across from headquarters. He shut off the motor, lit a cigarette and stretched. He had Mackintosh safely hidden out in a small hotel in the suburbs, with instructions not to leave his room and not to admit anyone except Hagan until the next morning. Mackintosh had been so terrified that Hagan didn't worry about his disobeying those orders.

All the way back to town Hagan had been debating his next step. He had to have some cooperation if he hoped to make any accusation stick against either Granlund or his hoodlums. He couldn't count on Chief of Detectives Baker; it was possible Captain Gillis might give him some help. If not, there was the D. A.'s office and the grand jury.

Finally he decided to take a chance on Gillis. He climbed out and headed for the green lights across the street. Halfway to the parking-lot gates he became aware that he wasn't exactly alone.

Nick De Mori stepped from behind a parked car and put a big paw on Hagan's right arm. Hagan sidestepped, started to jerk away, and his movement stopped with a jolt against a big, solid body to his left.

Pug Williams, the man to his left, said: "Take it easy, Hagan." His hand closed on Hagan's left arm.

Hagan was not a small man himself, but between De Mori and Williams he looked small. He didn't make any effort to wrest himself away from them, because he knew he couldn't do it. His face became rocky and bulging with knots of muscle at the corners of his jaws.

He said between his teeth: "Take your hands off, hooligans!"

They kept his arms clamped, but De Mori said uneasily: "Aw, now, Hagan, we only wanta talk to you."

"Then talk—but take your hands off first!"

"Granlund wants to see you, shamus," Williams said.

"One yell," Hagan said, "and there'll be a platoon over here from the desk sergeant's office. Do you get those hands off or not?"

The hands dropped away from his arms, but both big men poised, ready to grab at him if he made any move toward his shoulder holster.

"Granlund wants to see you, Hagan," Williams repeated.

"He knows where he can see me."

De Mori scowled. "You'll be very smart, Hagan, if you see the big fellow where he wants to see you. He's got something that you kinda like, my boy."

"And what's that?"

"He'll tell you. Do you come along or not?"

"Where?"

"Right on over to his nice office."

Curiosity more than anything else finally made Hagan nod. If De Mori and Williams had wanted to rub him out, he realized, they could have ambushed him as he climbed out of his car, and got away nicely; so he probably wasn't taking much of a chance in going along with them.

"Okay," he said. "Let's go."

Ten minutes later he climbed out of a long, dark sedan and walked between the two big men through the doors of the Charters Building. The gnarled man was still reading his paper under the naked bulb; he had got as far as the weather reports. He looked at Hagan and grinned, showing dirty teeth.

"Not so tough this time, eh?" he gloated.

De Mori said: "Shut up and take us upstairs."

The elevator jiggled them up to the seventh floor, and Hagan went down the corridor ahead of De Mori and Williams. The door of the A-B-C Investment Company was ajar, and Hagan slapped it out of his way, stood in the doorway.

GRANLUND, immaculately dressed as ever, sat behind the big desk. His deep-set, greenish eyes regarded Hagan with satisfaction and mild amusement.

"Hello, Hagan."

Hagan said flatly: "You wanted to talk to me, Granlund. Get started."

"Why be like that, Hagan? Sit down."

"I'll stand."

"Have it your way." Granlund opened a humidor, found an expensive cigar. He took his time lighting it while he looked at Hagan sardonically. "You've had a big night.

"And it isn't over yet."

"No, it isn't over yet," Granlund agreed. He regarded the ash of his cigar gravely, then shot his greenish gaze up at Hagan. "I'm not going to try to kid you, Hagan. You pulled a nice one when you picked Jerry Mackintosh up from under my nose and hid him out. I hadn't expected you to move that fast, and I'll admit that slip-up has put me in a slightly embarrassing spot. Just slightly, I said."

Hagan let his lips slide away from his teeth in a chilly grin. "It's going to put you in the hot seat, Granlund. Will your face be red then!"

"You're too optimistic, my boy," Granlund smiled. "I get ideas, too. Since we're here without any witnesses that might be friendly to you, I can speak frankly. You have Mackintosh hidden out—I have Nita Correlli hidden out."

Hagan's face went white. He took two steps towards Granlund's desk, his hand streaking for his gun. Granlund didn't move his body, but his right hand came up from below the edge of the desk and it held a Luger on which the light glinted darkly. Hagan stopped.

After a moment he said: "Granlund, you're beginning to expand too much. You had Pete Correlli killed, you had Al Correlli killed. The public may be long-suffering, but it isn't dumb. If anything happens to that girl, there'll be an explosion that will blow you and your rackets and everybody connected with you into the hottest hell there is."

"I'll take the chance," Granlund shrugged. "Anyway, nothing is going to happen to her unless you're more mule-headed than I think you are."

Hagan didn't say anything for a little. Then he said: "What's your proposition?"

"Tell me where I can find Jerry Mackintosh. When I've contacted him, the girl will be sent back home."

"And I'm to believe that once you've got hands on the only witness that can tie you into Al Correlli's murder, you'll turn her loose."

Granlund leaned forward over the desk, his eyes grim and bleak. "You'll take my word for that."

"The word of a rat."

"What's your answer, Hagan?"

Hagan rubbed his jaw slowly, thoughtfully. Finally he said: "Give me a little time, will you?"

"You'll have until tomorrow morning," Granlund said. He struck the surface of the desk sharply with his knuckles. "You call me here at nine o'clock in the morn-

ing with the right kind of an answer—or else."

"It'll be a happy morning for me," Hagan said thickly, "when I know they're pulling the switch on you in the death house."

Granlund stood up, grinning. "You'll never see that morning, Hagan. Hell, man, you can't win against me. You're no fool; you know I've got this town in the palm of my hand. I'm not admitting I had anything to do with the Corelli boys' being removed—"

"You don't have to admit it," Hagan growled.

"All right, suppose I did have it done because they were getting in my hair. You'll never prove it on me. And don't forget, Hagan, no later than nine o'clock."

CHAPTER VIII

Plunge to Hell

THE long, dark sedan, in easy disregard of traffic regulations, stood parked the wrong way near the entrance of the Charter Building. Hagan had come down from the A-B-C Investment office alone, leaving Granlund and his two big hoodlums up there. As he passed the car, a $15,000 imported creation that sparkled in the rays of street lamps, Hagan gave it an appraising glance. A car like that, he knew, must be the personal plaything of the racket overlord; no mere hanger-on could afford it.

He said "Umm" to himself, and when he reached the corner, he turned into the side street and started to sprint. He knew there was a taxi-rank three blocks away from the Charter Building, and he had begun to have glimmerings of an idea.

For once that night, luck sided with him, and he didn't have to run that three blocks. A Yellow loafed past him, unoccupied, on its way back to the stand, as he hit the first intersection. It slowed at his hail, and he jumped the running board, palmed his badge at the driver.

"Police business," he panted.

The driver, a round-headed little fellow, looked as though he didn't relish the idea of being mixed in police business. He said uneasily: "Okay, boss, but I don't like shootin'."

"There won't be any shooting," Hagan grinned, popping into the cab. "Go down to the next street and past the Charter Building, not too fast."

The driver nodded, swung the cab around. As they passed the Charter Building, Hagan saw with satisfaction that the big sedan still sat without lights in front of the door.

He ordered: "Park down in the next block and turn off your lights."

Fifteen minutes later Hagan, watching the sedan through the rear window of the cab, saw its headlamps suddenly go on, sending cones of brilliance down the street. The lamps swept out from the curb and veered in a U-turn.

"Get it started," Hagan snapped through the opened pane beside the hacker. "Swing around and follow that taillight you see. And keep your lights off until we begin to hit traffic."

"I should get a ticket, huhn?" the driver protested.

"I'll take care of any tickets," Hagan promised. "Get going, will you?"

The big sedan led them down to Fifth Street, where Hagan finally let the hacker switch on his lights. It went east on Fifth Street and, finally, south on Elm Boulevard. There was a moderate amount of traffic; Hagan held the driver a block to two blocks back of his quarry. At Fortieth Street, in a region of swanky apartment houses, the sedan turned left off the boulevard.

"Keep going to the next cross street," Hagan ordered.

When they slid across the intersection of the boulevard and Fortieth Street, Hagan saw the sedan had stopped before the awning of a ritzy apartment house halfway down the block.

"Set her down, Achilles," Hagan said, and the cab drifted into the curb beyond the crossing, stopped.

He separated a couple of dollar bills from a thin roll, slapped them in the hacker's hand and got going. The side street was dark, and he took the sidewalk across the street from the apartment building where the sedan still sat.

He got across from the well-lit lobby just in time to see Granlund and the two big men stepping into an elevator which was smaller and stood apart from the bank of three elevators that he reasoned must serve ordinary tenants of the building.

"And that," he muttered to himself, "spells penthouse to me."

There was a uniformed attendant in the lobby, and Hagan swore a little. There wouldn't be a chance of getting by the man without showing his badge and identifying himself, and that was the last thing he wanted to do.

He went down to the next corner, turned right and slid into the alley that ran behind the apartment house. There was a steel door at the back of the building but it was securely locked, and Hagan, after a minute, gave up trying to do anything with it.

Above him the iron framework of a fire escape clung to the wall of the building, but the counterweight ladder was a good six feet out of his reach. Prospecting along the dark stretch of the alley, Hagan finally found a tall refuse can, a discarded beer box. Piling the box on top of the refuse can below the fire escape, he found the first landing was still eighteen inches too far out of reach.

Bending his knees a little, Hagan got his muscles under him and shot himself upward. His right hand missed but his left clamped over one of the braces that held the framework to the building. He swung there for a moment, got his other hand around one of the slats, and inch by inch pulled himself upward, hooked a leg on the ladder and finally sprawled on the first landing, panting.

THE building was ten stories high and the fire escape ended a dozen feet below the coping of the roof. He tried the opaque, wire-glassed window at the tenth-floor landing. It was locked and the steel casement defied any attempt to slip a knife blade through the lock. He had started down to make a try at some of the other fire-escape windows, when his eye lit on the window of a tenth-floor apartment six feet away from the rail of the fire escape. One casement stood open, and Hagan could distinguish that the window was uncurtained.

He climbed outside the rail of the fire-escape, braced himself with one foot and hung on with his left hand while his right groped for the sill of the open window. His fingers clawed around it and he dropped away from the fire escape, hung by one hand for a moment, dangling ten stories above the alley. A moment later he was scrambling over the sill, through the open window.

A noise in the darkness at his left swung him around as his feet touched the floor. His hands shot out, clamped on soft flesh. A stifled moan sounded in his ears and a small, well-curved body fell forward against him. His fingers touched tape-swathed lips.

Hagan said, "Nita!" and grasped her.

He lowered her body to the floor, got out his pencil flash. Its thin ray showed Nita Correlli's eyes, big and brown, staring up at him. Her hands, her ankles, her mouth had been taped tightly and a lacerated bruise showed on one cheekbone. Hagan said things under his breath, began to get the tape off gently.

His eyes flicked about as he worked. They were in a living room, bare of furniture. When he had the tape off her mouth, the girl drew one deep breath, said: "I wasn't afraid. I knew you'd find me, Ben."

"I wasn't so optimistic, myself," Hagan said. "But I didn't quit trying, bambina. What happened to you?"

"About an hour and a half ago the bell rang at the flat. I thought it was you, but when I opened the door, there were two men I'd never seen outside. I tried to slam the door but one of them pushed in and knocked me down. The other one had his gun out and they made me come with them here and then they tied me up and left me. I managed to roll to the window and raised myself against the wall so I could work the lock with my chin. I got the window open, thinking maybe I could attract attention below when it got light."

Hagan got the last of the tape off.

"This," he said, "will knock Mr. Granlund's playhouse down in earnest."

"How?"

"I've got a witness who can identify two muggs that snatched Al. They can be hooked up with Granlund easy enough, and it's all something the grand jury will have to act on. The only thing I was afraid of was that I'd have to hand my witness over to Granlund to get you out of this jam. Now I don't have to do that."

"Do you really think you've got Granlund this time, Ben? He's pretty slippery."

"Yeah," Hagan said. He scowled. "I'm pretty sure that after Al was picked up by Granlund's hoods, he was taken to see Granlund before they killed him. If I could just prove that, I'd have Granlund where I want him—on the way to the chair. However, let's get out of here—all that can wait."

Hagan's flash showed them through a foyer, to a paneled door. Hagan got the door open a crack, put his eye to the slit. The hallway outside was softly lighted, quiet, unoccupied. He stepped out, pulled the girl out after him and they started, walking quietly, toward a stairway beside the elevator shaft.

They were almost to the stairway when a rumbling voice behind them said: "See who's here."

Hagan spun, his hand darting for his gun. The hand dropped when he saw Nick De Mori, smiling toothily at them, and holding a gun that steadied on the second button of Hagan's vest.

"Brother," De Mori said admiringly, "you certainly do get around."

Pug Williams stepped from around an angle of the hallway. He looked astonished when he saw the girl and Hagan.

"The gal doesn't like our company, Pug," De Mori grinned. "And it seems like Hagan couldn't wait until morning. Better take his rod. Turn your back, Hagan."

Hagan turned and Williams' big hand slid under his coat, lifted the gun from its shoulder holster.

"It's lucky we come down to see how the gal was getting along, Nick," Williams grumbled. "The big fellow would of given us hell if she'd got away. We better take both of 'em up to him, huh?"

"Yeah," De Mori said. "Get going, Hagan."

Under De Mori's gun, Hagan and Nita Correlli went down the hallway, around a turn to a flight of stairs that led upward. A steel door at the foot of the stairs stood open. Six feet from the steel door, Hagan edged over bit by bit so that Nita was walking ahead of him, would have to pass through the doorway first. She mounted to the third step, and Hagan entered the stairway, put his foot on the first step.

With snakelike swiftness his other foot lashed out behind him. His heel caught De Mori on the kneecap, and DeMori reeled and yelled with pain. His gun went off at Hagan's back and Hagan felt the slug burn itself across his ribs. The gun flamed again, but the bullet only clanged against the steel door that Hagan was pulling toward him. The door slammed, and Hagan, his eyes searching for the bolt, found a hinged bar that stood pointing straight upward on the door frame. He made a pass at it, and the bar fell with a clank into slots on the door.

OUTSIDE, fists hammered the steel, and some one tried to pull the door open; but Hagan knew that six men the size of De Mori and Williams couldn't have budged it, once that bar was in place. He whirled, started to take the steps three at a time.

Nita Correlli was just vanishing through another doorway at the top of the stairs as Hagan got under way. Hagan was almost to the upper door when he heard the girl give a gasping cry that was choked off almost at once.

Outside the doorway Granlund's voice said, viciously amused: "You picked the wrong way to run, baby. What's the matter with those bums, anyway? Can't they even keep a woman tied up?"

Hagan halted on the top step, edged his eyes around the door casing. Ten feet from this he saw Granlund. The racket overlord was in his shirtsleeves, and one sinewy hand was locked about Nita Correlli's throat while the other held a

gun that dangled loosely from his fingers. The two were between Hagan and the lighted windows of a small but luxurious-looking bungalow penthouse.

Granlund's back was to Hagan, and the detective took one slow step out onto the roof, two fast strides. Granlund whirled an instant too late. The gun started to come up but Hagan's fist was faster. It smashed the point of Granlund's jaw. Granlund catapulted backward half the distance to the house and collapsed in a heap, the gun dropping from lax fingers.

Hagan grabbed up the gun, a flat, black automatic. He flung a look over his shoulder at Nita Correlli.

"You all right, bambina?"

"I'm all right."

"Let's get this rat-meat into the house then."

Between them they dragged Granlund, who was moaning and gurgling, through the open door and into an expensively appointed living room. Hagan flung him on a lounge and looked around. In one wall across from a brick fireplace there was a sliding steel door. Beside it was a push button. Hagan strode over, punched the button, listened for the rumble of an ascending elevator. He heard nothing.

"They've got the door open at the bottom," he said. "Take the gun, bambina, and keep your eyes on Granlund and on the elevator. It's the only way they can get at us now, and if the door starts to open, slam a couple of shots at it. I've got some work to do."

He jacked a shell into the chamber of the gun and handed it to her. Working swiftly, Hagan brought from his pocket the package which Nita Correlli had given him earlier that night. He unwrapped it, disclosing a pair of military hair brushes. Holding them gingerly by the bristles, Hagan put the brushes on a table and took from the inside pocket of his coat a thin japanned box, the top of which he pried up with a thumbnail. The box contained a fine camel's-hair brush, a small magnifying glass and a flat bottle of powder.

Speedily Hagan dusted the sides and backs of the brushes, swept the powder off gently. The glass showed him dozens of prints, particularly on the sides of the brushes. Some of the prints were smudged, some overlapped but out of them all he picked three from each brush, ones he was sure were prints of Al Correlli's two thumbs, two index fingers, two middle fingers. He studied the prints, forcing himself to forget everything else for the moment until his mind registered the general pattern of each print.

Behind him he heard Granlund moan and mutter. He turned just in time to see the racket leader regain full consciousness. Nita Correlli swung the automatic in Granlund's direction and Granlund cowered away from it with a hoarse mutter of fear. The greenish eyes were mocking and sardonic no longer.

Hagan grinned wryly. He said: "Don't worry, Granlund. You're not going to get shot except maybe in a knee or a shoulder. Both Nita and I think murder's too good for you; we want to save you to burn. Just be good for a while and you won't get shot at all."

Granlund subsided fearfully and Hagan's eyes roved around the room. Suppose he had been brought, half drunk, up in the elevator, where would he have been most likely to put a hand for support once inside the room?

Beside the elevator door was a straight-backed chair of clean, grained mahogany. Hagan nodded. The chair was a possibility.

With his brush and powder Hagan started for the chair. He was nearing it when the elevator door started to slide open silently.

Behind him the gun in Nita's hand boomed twice, shaking the room with its thunder. One bullet slashed a scar across the steel of the sliding door, the other hit inside the cage. Within the cage someone swore viciously and the door reversed its motion, was shut hurriedly. A moment later Hagan heard the elevator descending.

"Nice shooting, bambina," Hagan said, grinning at her over his shoulder.

But the girl didn't return his grin. She came close to him, still keeping her eyes on Granlund, and she whispered very softly: "Ben, the gun is jammed. I tried

to fire a third shot but it was jammed. W-what shall I do?"

Hagan put his lips to her ear. "Say nothing and look tough. I'll have to do a little extra hurrying, that's all."

SWIFTLY he dusted the top of the chair, blew the dust away gently. The prints of four fingers of a right hand showed up clearly. Under his magnifying glass the prints looked familiar. Hagan carried the brushes over from the table while Granlund watched him venomously and at the same time with panic in his eyes.

Hagan compared the prints on the brushes with those on the top of the chair, straightened up finally with his gaze on the racket czar.

"And that, Granlund," he said, "cooks you. Al Correlli's prints are on that chair. The only time he could have put them there was between the time your hoodlums picked him up at the Blue Hour and the time he was bumped. He was brought here and you ordered him murdered."

Assured that Hagan and Nita Correlli didn't mean to kill him then and there, Granlund was beginning to regain a chilly calmness.

"What of it?" he sneered. "If he was here, that doesn't prove I killed him or even had him killed. Besides, what makes you think you'll get out of here alive, either of you? I happened to see the girl's gun jam, and the next time the boys make a try for up here, they'll walk in and knock you over without half trying."

Hagan's eyes roved the room, but Granlund's mind worked one second ahead. The racket leader lunged suddenly off the lounge, flung himself at a corner where wires led from a telephone box to an instrument on a low table. Hagan leaped, got the man by the nape, hauled him back. But Granlund's hand was already on the wires, clung to them, jerking them loose from the box as Hagan dragged him back.

Granlund slammed onto the lounge where he fell back, grinning triumphantly at the detective.

Nita Correlli suddenly cried: "Ben—the elevator!"

Hagan whirled, grabbed up a chair. Granlund tried to yell and Nita Correlli flung herself on him and clamped a small hand over his writhing lips.

But the elevator door opened only an inch or so, enough to admit a bulging muzzle. The muzzle coughed flatly, and something struck the opposite wall and burst. Granlund flung the girl from him and yelled, "Boys—boys!"

By then the elevator door had slid shut again and there was a whirring sound as it dropped. Almost immediately Hagan's nose began to sting, his eyes to water.

He said thickly: "Gas! We've got to get outside!"

Coughing and choking, Nita Correlli passed him, running toward the door. Hagan followed her, and behind him he could hear Granlund staggering and cursing. They made the open air and stood there gasping for a moment.

Hagan got out a handkerchief, began to wipe his streaming eyes. Momentarily he had forgotten Granlund.

He hacked and gasped, and in the middle of a racking cough something smashed him at the base of the skull. He pitched forward on his face, slammed into a stone flower pot. For seconds his legs and arms seemed to be made out of water. Scuffling sounds and curses in a choked voice from Granlund came to him from a great distance.

It seemed minutes but it was actually no more than seconds before Hagan rolled over on his back, started to climb to his feet with the aid of the stone flower pot. Six feet away he saw Nita Correlli clinging with desperate strength to Granlund.

Granlund's face was insane with fury, with virulence. He smashed the girl away from him just as Hagan got to his feet. Hagan bellowed like an enraged bull, took three tremendous strides and slapped his paw down on Granlund's shoulder. But the gas, the blow on his head from the iron door-stop Granlund still held in his hand, had robbed Hagan of a large part of his usual wiry strength.

His hand pulled Granlund around but couldn't hold him. The iron door-stop

rose and fell. Hagan caught the blow on his forearm and pain shot to his shoulder. He bored in under the next blow, snapped his right to Granlund's mouth. The impact didn't even slow the racket leader. He came at Hagan, the heavy door stop raised, and Hagan backed away from it, weaving dizzily.

The solid stone of the parapet, hip high, stopped Hagan after a dozen steps, and suddenly Granlund sprang at him. Hagan brought a big foot up, slammed it against Granlund's chest as he came, spun the man away from him. Granlund snarled viciously and lunged back at the detective, the door-stop flailing.

Hagan ducked. He felt Granlund's body smash into him, felt the man go off his feet, slide against the parapet, go up over him.

Hagan got one hand on Granlund's ankle, and the ankle jerked, slipped out of his fingers.

Granlund screamed once, horribly, as he slid out beyond the parapet. The scream died away and an instant later there was a dull, flat sound from below.

HAGAN picked himself up after a moment. He was groggy, and he muttered, "Farewell to a rat," while he staggered across the tiled roof to where Nita Correlli was trying to gain her feet.

She moaned: "Ben, look out—he's—he's—"

"He's just made a parachute jump without a parachute," Hagan muttered. "You hurt?"

"I'm—I'm all right."

"Then everything ought to be jake if Granlund's crackup down below just attracts some radio cops in a hurry."

"What h-happened?"

He told her briefly, said: "I'm satisfied. It was my story that murder was too good for Granlund because I wanted him to have plenty of time to know he was going to die. Maybe it was all right this way. They say in a fall like that a guy lives ten years in one second. I hope he lived twenty."

Far away the wail of a siren began to rise and fall. It came nearer and nearer with each instant. Nita Correlli, in the clutch of nervous reaction, clung to Hagan and sobbed.

Hagan grinned, patted her on the shoulder. He said: "Okay, bambina, it's okay. We've evened up for Pete, and we've evened up for Al. And everything's Jake again, isn't it?"

She sobbed: "I know, b-but—"

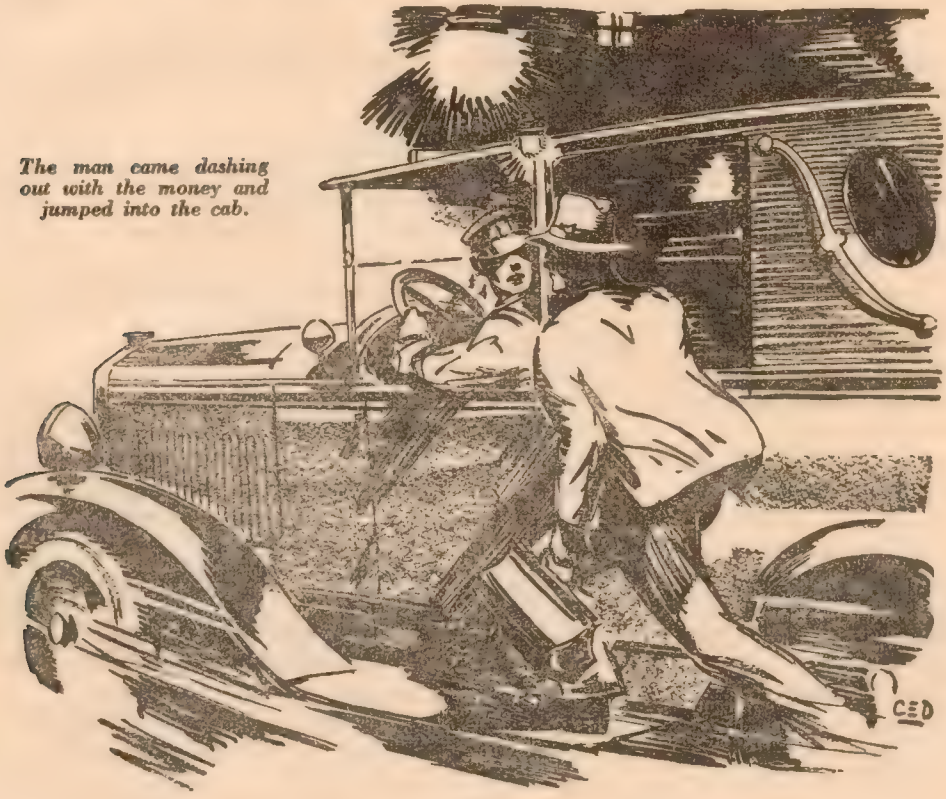
"But you haven't got a cop in the family any more. We could fix that up in a hurry, though. What do you say?"

The siren was less than a block away now.

She stopped sobbing, said: "I—I'm sort of used to having a cop around the house, Ben."

A kid's faith, a copper's self-respect, and a man's life might all be saved if the slug proved to be . . . .

A Bullet for Two



The man came dashing out with the money and jumped into the cab.

By Bob Gordon

Author of "Dead Men's Cargo," etc.

PATROLMAN David Lund felt vaguely uneasy as he pounded his lonely beat. Strange he had never noticed how deserted those streets were between First Avenue and the tracks, how completely devoid of life they seemed to be between the dark hours of his eight-to-four watch.

Lumber yards, coal yards, gloomy warehouses, jobbers for machinery and building supplies, made up the business of this district. These places closed up at dark and did not open again until after dawn. Only Klotz's Dairy, down on Railroad Street, showed any sign of life at night; yet oddly enough, it was in traversing this particular block that Lund felt the scalp of his blond head tighten, felt little shivers chase themselves down his broad back.

It was Friday, the thirteenth. That was the trouble, of course. Lund wrinkled his square-cut features into a sneer—a sneer meant only for himself. Was he getting soft? A cop couldn't afford to get soft.

Why, only fifteen months ago he had faced bullets in this same block, had faced them without a qualm. He had gotten a

grim thrill from shooting it out with that lone thug who had killed the cashier in Klotz's, who had tried to escape in a taxi, who had crashed the cab just around the corner with a bullet in his shoulder.

That lone thug had recovered from his wound. Tonight, at midnight, he was to hang for the crime.

And in spite of the fact that he had been caught red-handed and had been identified by his dying victim, he still protested his innocence.

Lund shrugged his massive shoulders, tried to feel impersonal about the whole affair. They all protested their innocence until the very moment the trap was sprung.

Why should he be uneasy on the night a murderer was to die? He had only done his duty in apprehending that killer, in testifying against him. He felt no malice against the man. Gary Helm had taken his chances with the law and had lost. Now he must pay the price. That was all there was to it.

But that wasn't all there was to it. Lund paced that particular block in front of the Dairy time and again, trying to fight off that strange sense of uneasiness, that sense of being watched, followed. Damn foolishness was what Lund called it; yet he wondered if it were cowardice, if he was too soft-hearted to be a cop.

A train rumbled by on the tracks the other side of the lumber yard. That would be the St. Louis Express, due at the station at 9:30. Time to ring the box—past time. The box was up on First Street, two blocks away.

LUND wheeled suddenly, started in that direction. As he turned, the tail of his eye caught a shadowy figure darting into a doorway on the other side of the street.

The big cop's uneasiness dropped from him like a cloak. There was a tingle in his spine now, but it was the tingle of expected action, a tingle he relished. Head straight ahead but eyes watching, nerves tensed for instant-action but masked by a deliberate, sauntering stride, he brushed his hand nonchalantly past his holster, undid the flap. Then he twirled his nightstick carelessly on the end of its leather thong, as if bored, preoccupied with his thoughts, oblivious to the unseen eyes watching him from the shadows.

Two years on this beat had left a picture of every building indelibly impressed upon his mind. That place across the street, now—he knew the layout without glancing at it. It was a plumbers' supply house, a long, narrow building. The front was taken up completely by two dingy display windows, divided by an entry-way. In the center of the entrance, flush with the sidewalk, was a thick concrete pillar. Whoever was hiding there would have to take refuge behind that.

A sidewise glance verified his theory. The whiteness of a face, topped by a low-pulled cap, peered around the pillar, then ducked back out of sight.

At that instant Lund's waiting muscles sprang into action. Wheeling off the curb, nightstick gripped tightly, he sprinted across the street. No chance for the prowler to get away now.

At the sound of his pounding footsteps, the head popped into view again. An arm shot out, leveled a dull nickel revolver directly at the charging cop.

Lund was almost across the street when he saw it. Too late to drag his own .38 now, he plunged straight ahead. The hand holding the gun gave a spasmodic jerk, and the revolver clicked harmlessly just as Lund reached out and grabbed the wrist.

He yanked on that wrist, twisted the muzzle of the weapon away from him, and was surprised at the slight resistance offered to his pull. The descending nightstick in his left hand remained poised in mid-air as he jerked the prowler into the dim light of the corner street lamp.

Still clutching the revolver in a skinny hand, staring up defiantly from beneath the peak of a ragged cap was a boy—not more than twelve years old.

LUND looked down at the kid, gently took the antique revolver away from him and slipped it into his own overcoat pocket. He loosened his grip on the lad's skinny wrist.

"What is this?" he asked seriously. "Cowboys and Indians at this time of night?"

The kid's lip trembled. In the dim light the freckles on his pale face stood out like gravy stains on a tablecloth.

"I ain't playin'," the youngster asserted defiantly.

"Now don't tell me you're a burglar," Lund chuckled, " 'cause if you do I might have to lock you up. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"I don't care what yuh do to me now," the lad answered savagely, "but if that gun had've went off, you wouldn't be lockin' no more guys up."

A wide grin spread over Lund's face.

"Tough guy, huh?"

"I'm just as tough as you are," the kid boasted weakly, dashing a tear from his cheek with the back of his free hand.

"Probably tougher," Lund agreed soberly, "but not so big. You ought to be home in bed. Where do you live, Johnny?"

The kid tried to twist away, protesting: "My name ain't Johnny."

"Okay, youngster. Suppose you tell me what it is."

"You know darn well what it is!"

Lund led the kid nearer the light and looked down into the big brown eyes from which hate glinted through welling tears.

"I've seen you all right, son," Lund admitted, "but I can't place you. Maybe you'd better help me out."

"I'm Jimmie Helm!"

Lund winced at the words. He groped for breath to ask: "Gary Helm's boy?"

"Yah!"

The big cop loosened his grasp on the kid's arm, took off his cap and dabbed at beads of sweat that had suddenly appeared on his forehead.

Lund lived years during the next minute of awful silence. There was something he ought to do, he knew, but it would be nothing covered by the Officers' Manual in his pocket. He finally hung his head and mumbled:

"Gee kid, I'm sorry!"

"Yah! A helluva time to be sorry, when they're stringin' my old man up tonight! Why didn't yuh get sorry before you shot him?" Jimmie's voice rose to a shrill scream. "Why didn't yuh get sorry before yuh lied about him to the judge?"

"I didn't lie about your father, Jimmie." Lund's voice was soft, humble. "I only told the judge just what happened. Your father killed a man, Jimmie."

The boy was blubbering now. "My old man never killed nobody. He just couldn't. It was that other guy he told you about what done it, but you wouldn't believe him."

Sobs shook the kid's small body. He wiped at his nose with a ragged coat sleeve, kicked at the curb with the toe of his broken shoe.

"If I was a cop," he declared between sniffs, "I betcha I'd get the right guy. I wouldn't let 'em hang a fella just 'cause he was a taxi driver."

"I guess you don't think I'm a very good cop, eh, Jimmie?"

"You're lousy!"

"Right now I do feel pretty rotten," Lund admitted. "Let's you and I go up to the Greek's on First Street and get us a bite to eat."

"I wouldn't take nothin' off of you if I was starvin'."

"Not even ham and eggs, and coffee—and mince pie?"

"Aw, gee whiz! Lemme alone, can't yuh?"

LUND waited until the kid had finished the ham and eggs, was digging into the pie, before he reopened the conversation.

"What were you doing down there on Railroad Street, Jimmie," he finally ventured. "Looking for me?"

"Yah! I was goin' to shoot yuh." Jimmie poised a forkfull of pie in midair and grimaced across the table. "Don't think buyin' me this grub is gonna get you off neither. If that bullet'd only of went off—"

Jimmie sniffed, stuffed the pie in his mouth to choke off a sob.

"Let's see why it misfired," Lund said.

He pulled the revolver from his pocket. It was a cheap nickeled .32 of Spanish make and pre-war vintage. He broke it, looked into the cylinder. The cause of the

failure to fire was apparent at a glance. There was only one cartridge in the gun, and that would not have fired until the trigger had been pulled three more times. Lucky for him the kid didn't know much about double action revolvers.

He dug a thumb nail behind the rim, flipped the single cartridge onto the table. Jimmie's eyes followed his movements with interest.

The cartridge case was unused, but had plainly been tampered with. The slug was grooved and misshapen; it had already been fired. Nicks and dents on the lip of the cartridge showed that the old slug had been removed, and this one inserted with considerable difficulty. Lund gripped the bullet between thumb and finger, pulled it from the case. A few grains of smokeless powder spilled out onto the table.

"This bullet something special?" he asked.

"Yah!" Jimmie's eyes glinted with hate. "Special for you! That's the same bullet you shot my father with."

"What makes you think so?"

"I was at the hospital when they took it outta him. I swiped it when they wasn't lookin'."

Lund leaned forward, stuck a finger under the kid's chin, looked him in the eye.

"Listen, Jimmie," he said quietly. "Don't lie about this. Are you sure this is the bullet they took out of your father's shoulder."

"Sure! Why should I lie. I ain't scared of you."

"Of course not, Jimmie! You've got no reason to be. I'm going to help you. We're going to save your father."

"Huh? Gee—"

There was an excited ring to Lund's subdued voice as he pulled out his own Police Special and laid it on the table.

"Look, Jimmie," he said. "Mine's a .38. This bullet here is a .32. I couldn't have fired it."

The kid looked from the gun to Lund, wide-eyed, trying to let the hope from the big cop's voice sink into his grief-numbed mind.

Lund left the kid sitting there, dashed for the pay phone near the door, fumbled in his pocket for a nickel.

It seemed like an eternity before a gruff voice responded to his furious dialing.

"Hello!" he shouted. "The District Attorney? Listen, this is Lund, Patrolman Lund, shield 79. Remember me? I'm the man who made the pinch in the Helm case .... Never mind! Just listen! You've got to stop that execution—get a stay, anything, only don't let that hanging take place tonight. Gary was right—there was another man, even though I didn't see him .... Sure I've got evidence. I'll stake my shield on it. No, seeing what you can do isn't enough. Do it! You don't want an innocent man's blood on your hands any more than I do. I'm going to headquarters now, with my evidence."

Jimmie was beside him when he hung up. The kid's eyes were shining, his thin hand gripping the sleeve of Lund's coat.

"Gee, Mister, do you think you can do it? Do you think you can save my dad?"

"You're darn tooting! Want to help?"

"Sure!"

"Okay. Come along."

IT took only ten minutes with the comparison microscope to prove that the bullet they had taken from Gary Helm's shoulder, and the bullet that had killed the cashier at Klotz's, had been fired from the same gun—the gun they had found in Helm's taxi, with Helm's finger prints on it.

"But your testimony?" the D.A. quibbled. "You swore you saw only one man come out of the dairy, and that he wore a taxi driver's cap."

"Helm explained all that on the stand," Lund said impatiently. "Helm's passenger pretended he was drunk, borrowed Helm's cap and amber glasses—said he wanted to have some fun with friends in the dairy.

"Helm waited outside in the cab. The passenger went in and held up the cashier, shot him. He came dashing out with the money and saw me walking up, patrolling my beat. He fired at me and jumped into the cab, forced Helm to drive

him away. I took up the chase on foot, firing at the cab. It took the corner too fast and piled up against a pole. The killer got sore and shot Helm, dropped the gun and money, and was gone before I got there. Maybe I hit him. I must have or he would hardly have left the money behind.

"Anyway, when I got there, all I had was a wrecked cab and a wounded driver. I took the driver to the hospital, turned in the money and gun."

"But before the cashier died, he identified Helm as the bandit," the D.A. persisted.

"But did he?" Lund's voice was loud, vehement in its earnestness. "He identified the taxi driver's cap and glasses, a cauliflower ear. Sure, Helm had a cauliflower ear, but maybe that's why the thug picked him to drive. He might have had that kind of a listener himself. After all, we've got more than one ex-pug in this town."

"And how do you explain Helm's fingerprints on the gun?"

"It isn't my job to explain them," Lund declared. "Helm explained them himself when he said he picked the gun up after the thug had shot him and dropped it. His idea, he maintained, was to shoot at the fleeing bandit, but by that time the gun was empty.

"The fingerprints on the discharged cartridges were not Helm's. The real murderer took care to wear gloves during the holdup, but he neglected that precaution while loading the revolver.

"The point is, Helm couldn't have shot himself in the shoulder from behind. Up to now it has been taken for granted that I shot Helm, but this bullet didn't come from my gun. There just had to be another man. I'll wager that when we find the other man, his prints will match those on the cartridges."

"All right," the District Attorney conceded, "you've proved there was another man, but that doesn't prove Helm innocent of participation. I'll get the governor to grant a stay on what you've shown me, but you'll probably have to dig up the other man to clear Helm entirely."

"I'll try that too," Lund declared, "but give me a break on it. Keep the stay out of the papers as long as you can."

"I can't possibly suppress the news after midnight," the D.A. said. "Reporters are there to cover the execution. The stay will automatically become news at midnight."

Lund nodded. "Till midnight then."

Jimmie followed him out into the hall, tugged at his sleeve, asked:

"That means they won't hang my old man, doesn't it?"

"Right! You still think I'm lousy?"

"Gee, no, Mr. Lund. I think you're swell."

WHEN they were outside, Lund said: "I ought to go back to my beat, I suppose, but right now I feel like running down the man who shot your father, the man who really killed that cashier. How would you like to help me?"

"Gee, I'd like that!" Jimmie's eyes shone with suppressed excitement.

"Your dad used to be a fighter, Jim," Lund continued. "If he were home tonight, and had money in his pocket, what would he do?"

"Go to the fights down at the Hippodrome. Bud Murphy is fightin' the champ tonight."

"That's just what I was thinking," Lund agreed. "Now this other fellow had a cauliflower ear. He must have been a pug once himself. Maybe he'd go to the fights tonight too."

"Gee, you're smart!"

"I hope so."

Lund paused on the corner, flipped the newsboy there a dollar, shushed down his thanks, and relieved him of his whole bundle of papers. He handed them to Jimmie, asking:

"Did you ever sell papers?"

"Sure. I used to have me a regular corner."

"You're going to sell some tonight."

Jimmie's face clouded. "Gosh," he grumbled, "I thought we was going to be detectives."

Lund shoved Jimmie into a taxi, sat beside him, ordered the driver to go to the Hippodrome. Then he explained:

"This fellow who did the killing is doing a lot of thinking tonight, Jimmie. He's thinking about your father, an innocent man, about to be hung in his place. Jimmie, I'm going to ask you to do something mighty hard."

"Just ask me," Jimmie declared staunchly. "I'll do it."

"That's the spirit. Now if these powder-puff fighters run true to form tonight, the scrap will go the full fifteen rounds. That means it won't be over for twenty minutes yet.

"I'm going to get you inside the door of the Hippodrome. I want you to sing out real loud, 'Helm dies on scaffold,' and keep yelling it until people come up to buy papers. Think you can go through with that?"

Jimmie gulped and said he'd try.

"You keep your eyes open," Lund went on. "When your customers start toward you, keep right on yelling, but come outside. If the man we're after is in there, he'll want one of those papers bad enough to leave the fight, come outside for it."

Jimmy nodded, too excited to put his thoughts into words.

Lund gripped the boy's arm, warned gruffly:

"When I step up to one of your customers, you beat it—get out of the way fast. If it's our man, there might be some more shooting. And there's been enough trouble in your family, without having you shot before your father gets to see you."

THE man at the Hippodrome door opened it for Lund to enter. The uniform was always as good as a pass. He tried to stop Jimmie though, in spite of Lund's gruff order to let him through.

Lund stuck his open palm in the gateman's face, pushed him aside.

The bell rang to end the eighth round.

Jimmie's high-pitched voice sang out:

"Wuxtry, wuxtry! Gary Helm dies on scaffold! Read all about it!"

Half a dozen ushers began to close in on him. Jimmie dodged them artfully and continued to shout his phony wares.

A few spectators close at hand beckoned him. Jimmie ignored them, began edging toward the door, still shouting. Near the ring, a tall fellow in blue serge stood up, stumbled over knees in a hurried effort to reach the aisle.

Lund pushed Jimmie through the door, whispered: "Keep it up outside."

Jimmie nodded, stationed himself on the sidewalk, his legs spread wide, and yelled "Wuxtry" louder than ever.

Lund watched the tall fellow coming up the aisle, limping slightly. He shaped up like a fighter, even looked a little bit like Gary Helm. A fierce feeling of elation surged over Lund as he reached under the tails of his great coat for his cuffs. His wild hunch might be working after all.

But as the fellow drew close enough for his features to be distinguishable, Lund pocketed the cuffs with a grunt. This man had no cauliflower ear. Lund even recognized him as a ham actor who had been fired off the road show of "Is Zat So" years before for heavy drinking. Later he had played heavies in local stock, but the stock company had long since given up the ghost to double feature movies—had folded. Lund was surprised that Conrad Copley—yes, he even remembered the name—should still be in town.

He nodded as Copley passed through the door, but his greeting was ignored. He turned his eyes back to the Arena, searching for anyone else who might be heading for the door, and thus missed the start of the little drama enacted outside.

Copley, it seemed, did want a paper. He bought one, snatched it out of Jimmie's hand, glanced at the head lines, even thumbed through the first few pages. Then he turned on the kid with a curse.

"What's the idea of yelling an extra?" he demanded. "This is the regular nine-o'clock edition."

"All right, cheapskate!" Jimmie piped. "Want your money back?"

Copley swung a vicious back-hand slap that cut Jimmie's lip, sent him sprawling on the pavement.

Lund stuck his head out the door to see why Jimmie had stopped crying his papers. What he saw was the lad picking

himself out of the gutter, while Copley limped swiftly down the street.

"He hit me!" Jimmie yelped.

WITHOUT waiting for an explanation, Lund gave chase. He caught the breathless Copley near the next corner, grabbed himself a fistful of coat. He slapped the actor a resounding smack in the face. As Jimmie ran up, Lund was searching the cringing Copley.

"What's the idea of hitting a kid, you overgrown bully!" he demanded at last.

Copley rubbed his smarting cheek, glared first at the cop, then at the kid, before muttering:

"The little gyp—yelling an extra when he's got nothing but the paper I bought hours ago."

Lund's eyes narrowed. "Why are you so interested in extras?"

"A guy's got to have something for excitement," Copley whined. "That so-called fight was boring me stiff."

"If it's excitement you want," Lund rasped, "how would you like to go a round or two with me—before I call the wagon and have you locked up?"

Copley winced and drew back, threw up an arm as if to guard against an expected blow. His voice struggled for dignity.

"I wouldn't like it at all. I'm overmatched. As for locking me up, don't be absurd. The kid had a smack coming and got it. Perhaps I had one coming, and I got it. We're square now. If the youngster feels abused, I'll apologize and give him five dollars to call it square."

"Shall I lock him up, Jimmie?" Lund asked, "Or do you want to settle out of court?"

"Gee!" Jimmie exclaimed through his swelling lip. "I'd like fi' bucks, but ain't this the guy we're after? He looks a lot like my dad. With a cauliflower ear and dark glasses, maybe the fellow what was shot couldn't tell the difference."

Lund took another twist on Copley's coat, pulled him close, stuck his face inches from the actor's and said:

"You do look a bit like him at that, and an actor could easily fake a cauliflower ear, especially an actor who used to play the part of a boxer on the stage."

Copley paled. He placed his hands against the cop's body, tried to push himself away from the menacing face leaning over his own. A sneer twisted his face as he growled:

"You're both nuts! If I looked anything like Gary Helm, I'd shoot myself."

"Fat chance," Lund snarled. "A guy that will go around slapping down little kids is too damn yellow to shoot himself, worse luck."

Then his angry frown changed to a look of shrewd wonder.

"Say-ay," he continued. "Who said anything about Gary Helm? How did you know who we were talking about?"

Copley bit his lip. "Why—why anybody'd know that," he stammered. "The papers have been full of his name for months."

"Yes, and you were mighty anxious to get a paper and read about him tonight. I'm going to take you down to Headquarters and lock you up. Then we can compare your finger prints with those found on the cartridges. If they match, good night one ham actor."

Copley suddenly stiffened. Lund felt something hard jammed against his belly. He glanced down, saw it was a gun in the actor's hand.

"Let go my coat and step back!" Copley snarled. "Up with your hands!"

Startled by the unexpected appearance of a gun, Lund obeyed. His brows knit in puzzled wonder over where the actor had obtained the weapon.

"You're not going to lock me up," Copley said, his voice taking on an edge of hysteria. "I shot at you once and missed. I won't miss you tonight. You're too close. Sure, that was I who held up Klotz's, killed the cashier when he resisted. And I framed things so that Helm would be identified too. What good does it do you to know that now. In a minute you'll be dead. You've had this coming for a long time, even if you hadn't stumbled onto the right slant tonight. I've been carrying one of your bullets in my hip ever since that night. Now you're going to carry my lead in your belly. And

the kid's going too. When they hang his old man tonight, I'll have nothing more to worry about."

WHILE Copley grew dramatic over his speech, Jimmy was sidling up to Lund on his right, and Lund, muscles tensed to launch himself at the murderer in front of him, was edging away. He didn't want the kid in the line of fire.

Finally Jimmie spoke up boldly:

"Why don't you knock his block off, Pal. They ain't no bullets in that gun."

Copley glanced down at the revolver in his hand.

Lund thought the kid was bluffing, blessed him for the ruse that took the killer's eyes off him for a moment. He chose that moment to spring forward, launch a right hook that draped Copley over a garbage can, even while the actor was frantically pulling on the trigger that responded only with hollow metallic clicks.

The big cop rubbed his knuckles a moment, then reached for a handkerchief and mopped the cold dew from his forehead.

"Phew!" he whistled. "That gun really wasn't loaded, and that's more than any target has a right to expect twice in one night. "How on earth did you know it was empty, Jimmie?"

"Shucks," Jimmie said, "you should a know'd that yourself. I only had one bullet in it, and you took that out back there at the Greek's."

Lund patted his left overcoat pocket sheepishly. It was empty, of course.

"He took it outa your pocket while you was roughin' him up," Jimmie volunteered.

Lund laughed at himself, ruefully, said:

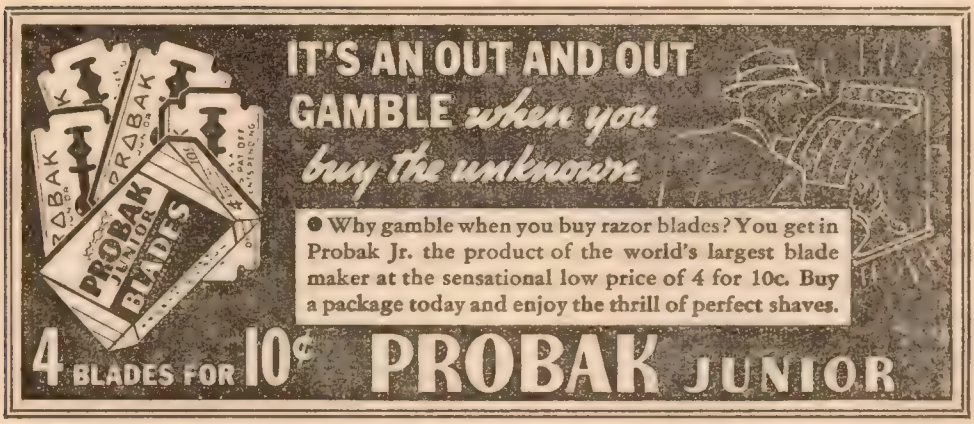
"I ain't much of a cop, am I, Jimmie?"

The kid grasped his pug nose with the tip of a skinny thumb and forefinger, answered in a high-pitched nasal voice:

"You're lousy!"

"I guess I am at that."

"Just as a cop though," Jimmie added hurriedly. "You're a swell deteckatif."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The Sealed Clue

By Stephen Payne

THIS Wednesday morning, as Frederick Layton let himself into the offices of Howard R. Phillips, Investments, he found his nerves taut as fiddle strings. However, any man contemplating murder might be excused a slight case of nerves. He felt positive his young, unlined and rather handsome features reflected no unusual excitement or mental tumult. Therefore the "old duffer" would notice nothing out of the ordinary about his private secretary and only office assistant.

When Frederick Layton became Murder's secretary to kill his boss, he forgot to do for his victim the one simple service any green stenographer would not overlook.

The "old duffer," Howard R. Phillips, was the man whose life Layton was going to snuff out tonight. Even his best friends would have conceded that Phillips had been something of a chump to marry, some eight months ago, a young, empty-headed doll.

Naturally the old man had soon found he couldn't stand the pace set by Elsie, and, after a month or so of gay parties and night clubs, told her so flatly. Therefore Elsie, already heartily tired of her "old fogy" husband, had, of late, been seeing a good deal of Frederick C. Layton. This had given rise to Layton's big idea. If Phillips were out of the way, Layton could marry his widow and, since the man had no living relations, gain control of the Phillips' fortune.

Forthwith, Layton had concentrated mentally on a flawless scheme; and on this particular morning, with plans laid and preliminary steps taken, he was impatiently waiting for the morning mail.

However, the first steps in the corridor were not those of the affable postman, but Layton's employer's. A white-mustached, elderly gentleman entered, turned piercing grey eyes upon Layton and remarked laconically: "You're earlier'n usual. Mail here yet?"

"No," answered Layton, thinking: "The old guy *would* live forever . . . . I'd be a plain idiot to lay off, expecting him to die."

"By the way, you finished drawing up those new leases for The Charlton and Forest Arms?" Phillips inquired.

"They'll soon be ready," Layton promised.

The leases, filled with glaring mistakes, were, as a matter of fact, now reposing in a drawer of Layton's desk.

Soon after Phillips had entered his private office, the outer door opened, admitting the postman with a cheery, "Good morning, Fred!"

When the man had gone out, Layton grinned crookedly at the pencilled address on one particular letter: "howard phillips, jackson bldg, denver." The name of the sender and return address were not on the envelope.

Using a folded sheet of paper as a buffer, Layton picked up the letter and thrust it into his inside coat pocket. He himself had written and mailed this letter in order that the envelope should bear the Denver postmark. It read:

Phillips— i got track of you agin atter fifteen year. im the mug you double crost in kansas city deal—nuf sed. mete me tonite wednesday at quarter past ten on south edge of decoy lake in this berg. Cum alone with ten grand in tens and twentys not marked neither—if you dont cum ill spill the works to the bulls and put you on the hot seat.

The police were to find this letter on Phillips' dead body. They would immediately look up Phillips' past and discover

he had come to Denver from Kansas City fifteen years ago. Whereupon they would assume that some unknown, unnamed blackmailer had lured Howard R. Phillips to Decoy Lake—dark, bleak and lonely at this time of year—and there murdered him!

AT five-thirty Layton handed his employer the leases he had purposely delayed showing Phillips earlier, and as the wily schemer had supposed, the older man said he would return this evening to check them. Whereupon Layton, after a leisurely dinner, sauntered to the Sheridan Apartments, where he had a small suite on the ground floor.

The main entrance of the apartment house opened on a large lobby with public telephone and a fireplace, where often the proprietor and his wife had a cheery fire, like the one they were enjoying this chilly evening.

At nine o'clock Layton made use of the phone to call an acquaintance. He then said good-night to Mr. and Mrs. Carstairs and to three of their tenants, and entered his own apartment, where he took from his trunk a length of lead pipe wrapped in very ordinary cloth, a piece of extra stout cord and a large spike—these his lethal weapons.

Turning out the light, he raised the window shade and took a stealthy survey of the little-used alley. All being apparently dark and silent, he lifted the lower sash, unhooked the screen and stepped out. Keeping to the darkest streets, the man walked rapidly to the Jackson Building where, lurking in the near-by alley, he had an uneasy half hour.

However, as a distant clock was striking ten, Howard R. Phillips walked briskly from the now darkened building to his small sedan parked at the curb, and Layton, sauntering along quite nonchalantly, called:

"Hello, Mr. Phillips. I've been to a show on Curtis Street, and when I came out it occurred to me you might give me a lift home, since it's right on your way."

"Why, hello, Layton! Uh? Give you a lift? Of course. Hop in and shove over . . . . So you've been to a show?" the older man continued as he stepped on the starter and threw in the clutch. "Damn it all, I wish you'd use more brains and thought on your job. Those leases—"

Layton smiled grimly. He'd expected a good roasting. He was getting it. The tirade continued until they reached a dark thoroughfare two blocks from the Sheridan Apartments. In this deserted street, Layton's left hand abruptly switched off the ignition and the lights; he slammed on the emergency brake. In the next sliced second his right hand swung the lead pipe to Phillips' skull.

Deftly then, Layton slipped about Phillips' throat the cord he had provided, tied it; and with his spike, twisted it as a doctor would a tourniquet. With frantic haste, he next placed his victim in the tonneau, covering the body with the lap robe.

Pausing for a moment to look and listen, he felt cold sweat on his forehead, his face, his entire body. However, along the dark block, he heard no movement; saw no one.

Thus reassured, the murderer seated himself behind the steering wheel, drove his grisly passenger to Decoy Lake. Having previously explored every foot of the ground, Layton switched off his lights before leaving the paved road.

A chill wind was rippling the dark water, drifting loose sand along the shore line. This wind-shifted sand would hide all tracks. Those dense bushes yonder, Layton didn't exactly like; but surely no one would be lurking among them on such a cold night.

Yet so apprehensive was he that a slight rending or tearing sound—a dull *pop*—as he was dragging the dead man from the car, made him start violently. A scrutiny of the tonneau with a pencil-flashlight failed to determine the cause of this, though it did disclose that there were no blood stains.

Finding in Phillips' pockets a purse and bill-fold, Layton emptied both. Pocketing bills and small change, he tossed both purse and bill-fold into the lake. His lead pipe followed. Lastly, he unbuttoned Phillips' overcoat and placed the all-im-

portant letter—the clue letter—in the inside pocket of the man's suit coat.

The job was done—finished. Layton wiped clammy sweat from face and brow with gloved hands—he had not forgotten to wear his gloves—and rushed homeward on foot. Sidewalks and pavements would record no tracks. His alibi was iron-clad. There'd be nothing, *nothing* to point to him.

IT was eight o'clock the following morning when the murderer entered the elevator at the Jackson Building, and the scrambled jargon of a newsboy lustily calling an extra reached his ears.

Said the elevator pilot: "That kid's yellin' as Phillips has been kilt. Gosh, that just can't be!"

Layton showed swift and befitting astonishment and concern. In another minute he had an extra for himself, from which the black headlines stared accusingly:

Howard R. Phillips Brutally Murdered!
Unknown Assailant Leaves No Clue.

"The devil he didn't!" thought Layton. "Why—why don't they mention the letter?"

Reading on, he learned how W. B. Snyder, a storekeeper residing in the vicinity of Decoy Lake, had soon after daybreak, seen the Phillips' car on the sandy lake shore. When it remained motionless, he had gone to investigate. Thus he had found the body of Phillips, a strong cord twisted with a spike, about his throat.

Snyder called police headquarters, and Radio Patrol car 14, containing patrolmen Shrader and Yost, at once sped to the scene of the crime. According to the paper, they had found in the shallow lake the dead man's bill-fold and purse, and a short piece of lead pipe wrapped with dark cloth—but no clue pointing to Phillips' unknown assailant.

Layton felt cheated, baffled, worried. Hadn't the dumb fools searched Phillips?

A police car had whisked up in front of the building, and a tall man in blue was entering the lobby. To the assembled dozen men, all reading the papers or exclaiming about the crime, he said:

"I'm looking for Frederick Layton, Howard Phillips' secretary."

A shiver ran down Layton's back, but his face was impassive, and his voice controlled as he returned: "I'm Layton, officer. This—this hellish thing—it's kind of got me."

"It's a headache to me," replied the officer. A huge man, with rough-hewn, dark-jowled face and heavy-lidded eyes, he appeared to Layton both ponderous and stupid.

"I'm Shrader," the big fellow was going on in a slow, deep voice. "The chief sorta hopes you can throw some light on where was this Phillips last night, and so forth, being as you're the man closest to—"

"I was more than his secretary. I was his friend," said Layton. "More than glad—anxious to give you boys any help I can."

Shrader introduced his companion, patrolman Yost. The three were soon at headquarters, where they found Mrs. Howard R. Phillips, surrounded by reporters. However, she was not this morning the vivacious, provocative creature Layton had known; for her round cheeks were streaked with tears, her voice choked and her amber eyes sad.

Present also were a few close friends of the murdered man, as well as his attorney, and, of course the chief of police, who at once began questioning those summoned.

Phillips' friends, it developed, knew nothing whatever of his movements on the previous evening. If he had had an enemy, they were unaware of it.

Layton, bored beyond measure, glanced around to note that Patrolman Yost was no longer present and Shrader seemed half asleep. "Big, stupid goof," thought Layton. "Any kid could put it all over on him."

Attorney Owens, a tall, thin man, reputed to be as sharp as a whip, was being questioned. . . . Had Phillips made a will? . . . No—and the lawyer looked at crushed young Elsie—but his entire es-

tate would naturally go to his widow, as he had no relatives.

It was Elsie's turn. Had her husband any business worries which he might have discussed with his wife? . . . He never discussed business with her.

At the next question, Layton felt himself stiffen, particularly as Shrader suddenly lifted heavy eyelids to gaze intently at the secretary's face.

"Did Mr. Phillips object to your going out with other men—Mr. Layton, for example?"

SHOWING her first touch of anger, Elsie looked the chief straight in the eye. "It is true I have been to parties and dinners with other men, but always with my husband's full knowledge and consent. Does that answer your question?"

"Assuredly," answered the chief, while Layton glowered at him. Damn these blundering cops anyhow! How they nosed into a fellow's private business!

Prompted by a new question, the young widow related all she knew of Phillips' movements during the previous evening. He had come home to dinner at six o'clock; had said he was going back to his office, and had driven away in his car. This was the last time she had seen him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Phillips," said the chief. "Now, Mr. Layton—"

"Anticipating your questions, chief," Layton interrupted, "I last saw dear old Mr. Phillips at five-thirty yesterday evening—when he left the Jackson Building for his home, telling me he would return to his office after dinner. I had dinner alone, walked leisurely to the Sheridan Apartments, sat in the lobby for a time, went to my own rooms and turned in.

"This morning, as usual, I went to the office and—heard a newsboy—" Layton's voice cracked.

At this point a plainclothes man entered and announced: "Chief, I've talked with the night-janitor, elevator pilot, and what-not, at the Jackson Building. Phillips was at his office last night till the lights blinked at about ten. Phillips rode down in this pilot's elevator, and he said good-night to the old man. That was the last he saw of him."

"Find any other witnesses who saw Phillips last night?"

"Nope."

"That's proof he was to his office," Shrader spoke up. "But," he complained, "nobody's helped us none to find what he done after he left."

"See here!" ejaculated Layton, deciding this lie he was about to tell would strengthen his letter clue—the master clue these cops had apparently overlooked. "I just remembered a matter I considered of no importance at the time. Some weeks ago, Mr. Phillips received a crank letter bearing an almost illegible pencilled address and the Kansas City postmark."

"Yes!" the chief barked. "What about this letter?"

"I slit it open, carried it with others into Phillips' private office and laid it on his desk."

"You in the habit of opening his mail?" inquired Shrader. "You generally see it first?"

Layton nodded, nettled for some reason he could not define. The chief snapped. "Never mind the questions, Shrader. Get to the point, Mr. Layton."

"About noon, Mr. Phillips came to my desk with this envelope and the letter in his hand," resumed Layton. "He said, 'Beats all how cranks think they can run a whizzer on square men these days. Read this damn' thing, Layton.'

"As nearly as I can recall the scrawl read, 'Phillips, I'm coming to Denver to make it hotter'n hell for you. I'll bleed you plenty, or else—' . . . . that was all. No signature—nothing except the Kansas City postmark to indicate from where it had come."

"But," the chief was all eagerness, "you asked Phillips who'd sent this threat?"

"Naturally. His only reply was a snort of derision, nor did he again mention the incident."

"That's something to go on, Shrader," said the chief. "Since you're the man delegated to this case, make the most of it."

"Yes, sir," said Shrader in his slow, ponderous manner. "I'll suggest now that me and Mr. Layton and Phillips' lawyer visit Phillips' office. Maybe we can find a real clue."

"Damn you!" Layton almost cried aloud. But though his lips moved, he did not let the words escape, *"You've got a real clue!"*

How he wanted to ask Shrader about that letter in Phillips' pocket! This agony of suspense was getting on his nerves, driving him half mad.

Nodding to Elsie Phillips, he went out with Shrader and the lanky attorney, Owens. In the hall, they met Patrolman Yost. Whereupon Shrader murmured, "Be with you guys quick as I speak to Yost."

LAYTON could not over-hear the brief conversation of the two patrolmen. Yost, however, did not accompany Layton, Shrader and the attorney to Phillips' office in the Jackson Building. Here Layton had showed the two men into Phillips' private room and had returned to his own desk. At a slight rustling sound his eyes darted to the outer door.

An envelope had been thrust through the letter slot. Picking this up, Layton found it to be without stamp or postmark, addressed plainly to him. Tearing it open he unfolded a single sheet of paper and read:

> The letter that was in the dead man's pocket will cost you ten thousand bucks. Meet me at Decoy Lake at midnight. I'll be in the brush with a gun. If you try to cross me up, it'll be too bad—for you!

Layton, with every vestige of color drained from his face, reeled back to his chair and clapped his hands to his head. Rallying, he threw a swift, apprehensive glance at the door beyond which were an attorney and a policeman. It was closed, that door. The two beyond it had not seen his reaction to words which had stunned him. The message, telling so little, was all the more sinister because it left so much to inference.

Suddenly the haunted man leaped to the outer door, and threw it open. Whoever had delivered that hellish threat might be still in sight. But the corridor was empty; not even a reporter lurking near. Layton heard behind him Officer Shrader and Attorney Owens coming from the private office.

"I ain't found nothing here to give me a lead," Shrader was complaining. "You find any clue, Mr. Layton?"

"No," gulped Layton, and covered his confusion by saying: "Naturally, this business makes me feel sick. Any objections if I go home now, officer?"

"None a-tall. Guess you've done all you can for the present. You'll be at the Sheridan Apartments if I should want you?"

"Yes." Layton, suffering the agonies of the damned, went out to the street, hailed a taxi and rode home. Ten thousand dollars! Would the fellow lay off, even if he got it? To think there'd been a witness to queer his perfect crime! But the damned blackmailer had not yet squealed to the police. So tonight Layton must meet and silence forever that unknown witness . . . .

TO the mentally tortured man, the day seemed endless. But at last it was over, and at the hour of midnight Layton found himself once again approaching the bleak and lonely shore of Decoy Lake.

This time he was on foot. This time his hand gripped an automatic in his coat pocket. Nothing moved in the vicinity. He heard no sound, save the soft lapping of water at the shoreline. Warily, pausing often, he drew nearer to certain dark bushes that last night had given him momentary uneasiness, such excellent concealment they offered for a lurking spy.

Finally he stopped, called hoarsely: "Here I am!"

Out of the dark shrubbery a gruff voice answered: "You're Layton? You've got the dough?"

"I'm Layton. Damn it, man, I couldn't raise the dough. Come out so I can talk this over with you."

"No dough, Layton—no letter."

"What's the letter matter now?"

shrilled Layton. "It's what you know—know about me—that matters. You'll get your ten grand hush-money as soon as ever I can raise it. Now come, show yourself and—"

"Toss your rod in the lake, and I'll step out where you can look me over," was the reply.

"Rod?" Layton began. "I've got no—"

The voice thundered: "Get rid of it! Three guns covering you, killer!"

Layton heard a rustling of the shrubbery to the right; another rustle to the left. As ordered, he hurled the gun from him, whereupon, out of the shrubbery stepped Attorney-at-law Owens, Patrolman Yost and Patrolman Shrader!

Although thunderstruck by this turn of events, sight of the policemen sent a white-hot fury through the trapped man. Without thinking of what he was saying, he rapped out:

"So you, you dumb flatfoots, were laying for me. Anyhow I have the satisfaction of knowing you stupid bunglers would never have found the right trail if some damned loiterer hadn't seen me and spilled the works. The louse!"

"Don't be so sure anybody spilled the works," returned Shrader in his deliberate manner. "You see, Layton, some things didn't track nor fit together no way I could figger 'em. One of 'em was this!" He drew from his pocket the letter Layton had planted on Phillips' body.

"'Nother was that the old guy had been bumped off before ever he reached Decoy Lake, and—"

"Eh? How could anybody even suspect that?"

"We-el, there wasn't much to go on, 'cept only a shoelace caught on a tack in the bottom of the back end of the car. That broke-off piece and Phillips' right shoelace matched, and I sorta figgered it busted when the body was dragged outta the car."

"Oh, you did, smart guy?" Layton now managed to sneer.

Shrader resumed, entirely unruffled: "Phillips being dead before he got to this lake didn't nowise track with this threat," holding up the letter, which demanded that he meet some guy here.

"If you can follow a dumb cop's reasoning, you'll see how I figgered the letter *had been planted;* not overlooked by the killer and not forgotten, but left behind a purpose—to set the police on a false trail, of course."

Layton muttered, "Yeah? I suppose it's possible for a cop to guess lucky."

"I told Yost to say nothing about the letter which we took the liberty of reading, and stuck it in my pocket," Shrader went on. "Then I talked to the postman who delivers mail to the Jackson Building, and—"

Layton cut in: "What did he tell you?"

"Told me you looked at Phillips' mail before the old man saw it; told me he remembered this same letter well as could be, 'count of the lead pencil and bad writing. Tole me he'd delivered it to you 'bout eight-thirty, Wednesday morning.

"A little later, in the chief's office, I seen where you might ha' had a good motive for getting rid of the old guy, your boss. Like the French say, 'Look for the woman.' Then Layton, you up and told that Phillips had got a threat letter, some time back, like this one, and right then I was dead sure who'd killed the old man."

"How could you have been?"

"That message you got in Phillips' office while me and Owens was in the back room was writ by Yost, and you shore rose to the bait. If you *hadn't been guilty you'd have showed it to us!* . . . Slap the bracelets on him, Yost."

A click, and Layton felt cold metal encircle his wrists.

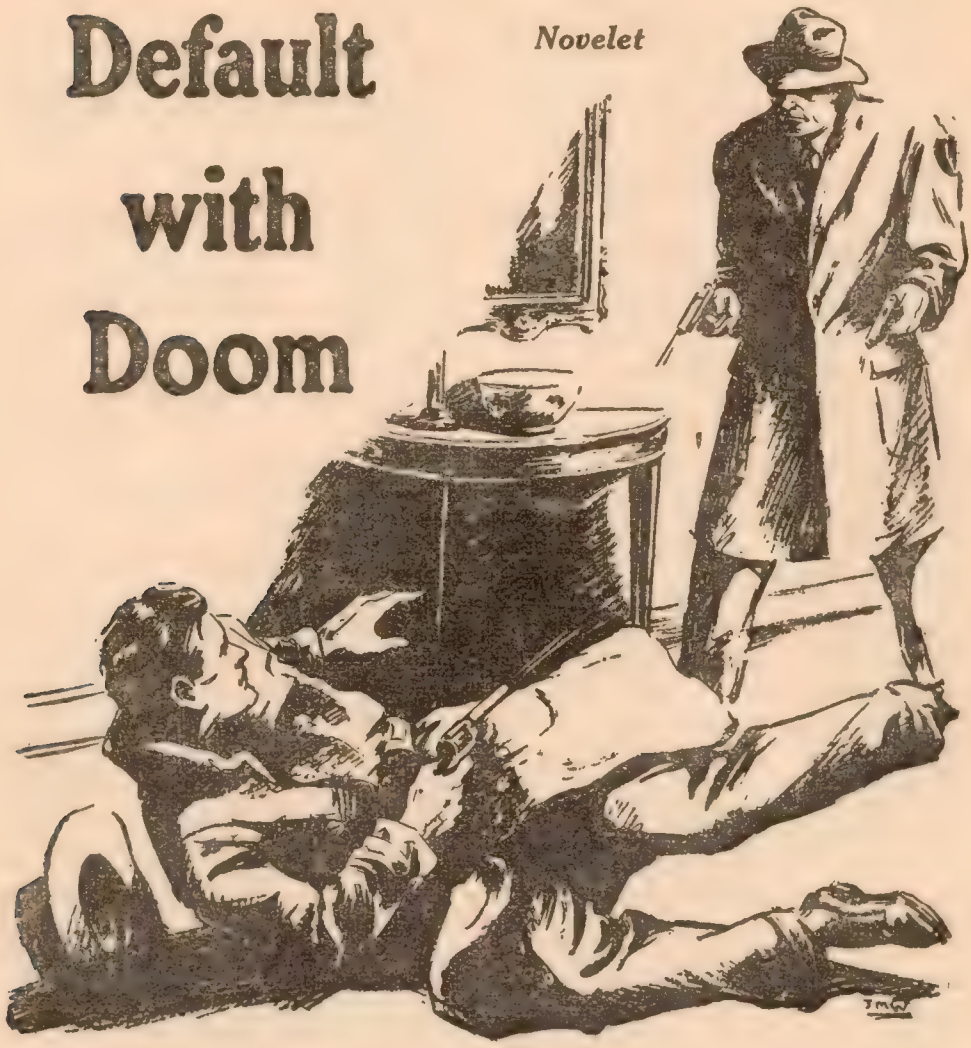
"You—you got me dead to rights, I guess. But, damn it all, I still can't see why that clue letter of mine should have back-fired. It should have furnished a motive for the crime by some unknown blackmailer. In your stupid blundering, you just guessed that it was planted. Well, your guess was right."

"No guess about it," Yost spoke up. "Shrader knew positive that letter was planted on Phillips' body and for what reason it was planted. How'd he know? *Because Phillips had never even looked at it. The one thing you, the killer, forgot was to open the letter!*"

Mike Shane, private dick, offered to trade the life of a gambling queen for the life of the girl he loved. But the deal turned out to be a . . . .

Default with Doom

Novelet



By Cleve F. Adams

SHANE had no business mixing in the case. He knew that, even as he cut the radio and spun the coupe around in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard. They could kill all the columnists in the world, and it would be okay with Shane; he wouldn't lift a finger, only—well, there was Martha. She was this d'Arcy mug's secretary. D'Arcy's murder might just happen to spell trouble for Martha.

Shane stopped and fortified himself with a couple of slugs of rye against seeing Martha. The six months weren't up, but what the hell? Maybe she wouldn't mind. Maybe she'd even be glad to see him, and, anyway, there was the murder.

It was raining a little, not hard, when he jack-knifed his long legs under the wheel again. The tires made sucking sounds and the asphalt felt slippery, greasy. The Legion fights were just let-

ting out. Must be after eleven, Shane guessed. He didn't know for sure because he never bothered to wind the clock on the dash. His strap watch wasn't running, either.

He swung left on La Brea, right again onto Sunset. Presently he parked across from the big house on Wedgewood Terrace. There were a lot of cars around, police cars mostly, and an ambulance. The driver and a white-coated interne sat on the lip of a marble fountain in the middle of the lawn, apparently oblivious to the rain. They could have sat in the ambulance just as well.

Shane mentioned this to them as he went by. They said they liked to sit in the rain. He pumped long legs up the drive and onto the veranda. Five legmen on the police beat surrounded him. He was a head taller than any of them and they had to lean backward to see his face. They seemed to feel pretty bad about Guy d'Arcy. A newspaperman, one of their own brothers, that sort of thing.

Shane grinned. Not a man there was making forty a week; d'Arcy's take had run into the thousands. Shane's grin was a little lop-sided, the wide mouth turning up at one side only. His big nose was put on crooked too; waggishly, with a distinct cant toward the more optimistic side of his mouth. His eyes were very tired. He told the boys he didn't know anything, went inside. Cops were everywhere, but nobody tried to stop him so he went down the long hall to a lighted door at the rear.

A girl came out of the door, stumbling a little, with her hands pushed out in front of her as if she couldn't see very well and was feeling her way. She had been crying. She was tall, for a girl. The top of her head fitted nicely under Shane's chin when her arms caved against his chest. She pushed at him, and when he didn't move, she stepped back, peered up at his face.

"Hello, Michael," she said without inflection.

He said, very low: "Martha, honey, I had to come. What've they been doing to you?"

"Accusing me of murder, mostly," she said. "Give me a handkerchief, Michael."

He fished one from the pocket of the shabby trench coat, held it out awkwardly. She dabbed at her eyes, blew her nose quite loudly, almost like a man. That was one of the things Shane liked about Martha Young. No hysterics, lots of character. He said again: "I had to come, Martha. You don't mind?"

She looked at him. "What? Oh, no, I don't mind, Michael, only the answer is still the same." She suddenly made up her mind about something. "Michael, do you suppose you could find Jim?"

"Jim?"

"Jim d'Arcy, Guy's son."

SOMETHING went out of Shane's eyes. He said, "Oh," rather absently, took off his hat and shook rain from it. "So he ran out on you. Left you holding the sack."

She clutched his arms fiercely, "Shane, it isn't what you think. He didn't do it, I tell you. I had to admit that he had a quarrel with his father—the housekeeper would have told them, anway—but he didn't kill him. He couldn't have."

Shane said: "No, of course not, Martha," but his voice was flat, without conviction. He put on his hat again, said: "Well, I'll tell 'em it wasn't you, anyway." He left her there, went into the room, ducking his head a little because he rarely found a door that was high enough.

The men in the room all looked at him. All except Guy d'Arcy. He was staring at the ceiling, not seeing it. They'd taken the knife out of his heart now. It lay on the desk, matching the blotter and the rest of the set. The blood on the blade was turning brown, ugly.

Captain Udell said: "Hello, shamus. Who let *you* in?" He was a beefy man with tiny ruptured veins in his cheeks and nose. He had a short, gray-brown mustache that bristled when he talked, and amber eyes, like a cat's. He didn't like Shane very well. That made them even.

Shane's eyes looked sleepy. "I'm a friend of the family, sort of. I'm sup-

posed to tell you that neither the girl nor Jim d'Arcy did the job."

Udell snarled. "Oh, yeah? Well, it'll take more than *your* tell, shamus. Might help some if you could turn up this d'Arcy mug, though." His pale eyes roved over the roomful of dicks. "He seems to be missing, don't he, boys? Missing right after a fight with his old man. Funny, hunh?"

Nobody laughed, though. Shane said: "What's so funny about it?"

Udell chuckled nastily. "We just found the will. The old man left most of his dough to the kid, but a nice slice goes to Martha Young, too. Plenty of motive for either of 'em right there. Besides, the girl was playin' both ends against the middle. The old man was making passes at her and so was the son. I understand that's what the quarrel was about."

Shane folded slowly into a chair. He looked tired all over now; tired and very thin. Even the faded trench coat, cinched tight about his middle, didn't make him look any thicker.

Udell stood over him suddenly, menacingly: "Where's Jim d'Arcy, Shane?"

"I wouldn't know, skipper, and that's a fact." Shane looked at Guy d'Arcy. He was a little disappointed in d'Arcy, even as a corpse. He watched them take the body out; watched the pudgy little deputy examiner put his things away, and the photographers and the print men and precinct dicks. Udell kept shooting glances at him from under beetling brows, but didn't say anything. He would later, though. Shane knew Udell.

There was a dictaphone beside the desk. Shane looked at it, saw that it contained no record. A quizzical wrinkle gathered between his eyes. Slowly he got to his feet, ambled across the room, stepped into the little office where Martha worked.

The wrinkle dissolved from Shane's brow as he closed the door softly behind him. In two lazy strides he was at Martha's desk, bending over the duplicate dictaphone. This one had a record in it.

He put on the headset, played the record back—d'Arcy's column for tomorrow, evidently. The needle came to a paragraph more outspoken than any of the others. Shane's eyes got sleepier than ever.

He took off the headphones, got up. Lazily, he walked out of the little room.

OUT in the hall he found Martha trying to soothe the housekeeper. The housekeeper had been crying, too. Udell couldn't seem to convict anybody of murder unless he made them cry first. It was sort of a routine with Udell.

Shane said: "Could I talk to you a minute, Martha?"

She'd got control of herself now. She gave the woman a last pat on the shoulder, led the way into the living room.

Shane said: "Tell me about it." He had to bend a little, at the knees, to look deep into her eyes.

"There isn't much to tell," she said wearily. "They found my fingerprints on the knife, and Jim's too, by comparison with some of his personal things. His not being here makes him the logical suspect, though they haven't quite given me up. Seems the—killer held the knife thumb forward or something and I didn't do it to suit them."

"No," said Shane, "you wouldn't. Only experienced hands know how to hold a knife. This Jim fella—he ever fool around with knives much?"

She looked startled. Sudden fear crept into her eyes, but she answered honestly enough. "I think so, Michael. That is, he used to when he was younger. Did tricks with them, and—and things."

Shane said, "Ummmm," and wandered about the room.

She came to him then, stood very close. The perfume from her hair was like incense. "Michael, you must find him. Help him get away. If you need money—"

He pushed her from him roughly. "There isn't that much money, Martha. I don't like the guy, anyway. Killing the old man is bad enough, but leaving you to take the rap is worse."

She said, low: "If the answer was 'yes,' Michael? Would you then?"

Slow red crept into his cheeks. "Like that, hunh? Martyred for love. Well, the hell with it. I don't want any part of it."

He swung toward the door, halted as Udell came in.

Udell said: "What goes on here?"

Shane said: "By me, skipper."

"Well, keep it that way," said Udell nastily. He jabbed a thick finger at the girl. "And don't you go gettin' any funny ideas, either. You're not in the clear by a long shot, but I'm not taking you in till we pick up your boss's son. I'll just leave a man to kind of keep an eye on you." He followed Shane down the long hall. "Friend of the family, eh? So what?"

"So I think I'll go out and lift a few," said Shane. "Nice night for it." He shivered a little, turned his coat collar up. It was raining harder now. The ambulance and the white-coated interne were gone, and so were a lot of the cops. Shane got in the coupe.

HE stopped at the first night spot he came to, had a couple more ryes. They didn't help much. It was pretty cold, or maybe it was the look in Martha's eyes when he left. In Marchetti's club, a half hour later, some perverse humor made him remember the record he'd heard back there in Guy d'Arcy's office. He climbed carpeted stairs to the mezzanine, knocked on a door marked "Private."

Marchetti himself opened the door. "Oh, you!"

"In person," said Shane amiably, and wandered in. He hummed a little, slightly off key, added lyrics of his own to a few bars: "Is it true what they say about Gino?"

Marchetti was a round man. Everything about him looked round and his tailor hadn't been able to do much about it. His face looked like pie dough with a couple of raisins stuck in it for eyes. You weren't conscious of his mouth, it was so small.

He said: "Well, w'at do they say about me?"

Shane took his time. He swung a long leg over a corner of the desk, helped himself to a cigarette. He was ready for a fight with some one, and it might as well be Gino Marchetti. Besides, he was curious.

"They say that you and Mrs. Wentworth Lowden are just like that." He held up two fingers. "They say, in fact, that it isn't really Gino who makes the rackets go round and round, but a well-known society dowager."

"Who says that?" The raisin eyes glowed a little; otherwise, the face remained the same. "Who you theenk would say things like those?"

"I dunno," said Shane carelessly. "Be interesting to look into the rumor, though, if a guy had time." He listened to the music floating up from the supper room below.

Marchetti didn't say anything for a while. Short legs carried him around the black and chromium office. He took things up with his fat, pudgy hands, put them down again. Presently he wound up at Shane's side. The raisin eyes and tiny, pursed mouth looked a little anxious.

"Shane," he said without a trace of his affected accent, "Shane, you look kind of seedy. You wouldn't be needing money, would you?"

Shane's eyes got crinkly. "There isn't that much money, Gino. Not if I was interested and had the time."

"But you haven't the time?"

"No," said Shane, making up his mind that he'd been a heel about Martha. And, anyway, it wasn't any fun baiting Marchetti. "No, Gino, I haven't the time. I gotta find a guy named d'Arcy. You haven't seen him tonight, have you?"

"Guy d'Arcy, the columnist?"

"No, his son Jim."

Marchetti said no, he hadn't seen Jim d'Arcy. "He comes in here once in a while, though. Quite a boy, I hear." He poured two drinks, a long one for Shane, a shorter one for himself. "Well, here's a long and useful life, copper."

"For both of us," said Shane, wiping his lips. "Goodnight, Gino." He went down the carpeted stairs and out to his battered coupe. There was a clock on the ornamental light post on the corner. It said twelve:forty.

SHANE had been in nine more places by one:thirty. Nine places meant nine drinks to Shane, but it hadn't even begun to show. It never did. People wondered about that; the same people who liked him but said he was a hard guy to figure. In the last place, Pop Haggerty's, he got word of Jim d'Arcy.

D'Arcy had come in around eleven, Pop said. Looked all hotted up over something. Had three or four quick ones and then went out again. It was about this time that Shane realized he was being tailed. He'd been seeing that same face in nearly all the mirrors. He went along the bar, very steadily, to the guy the face belonged to.

"Do I know you, Dark and Handsome?"

The guy was dark, but he wasn't handsome. Plenty big, though. Almost as tall as Shane and three times as wide. He was drinking ginger ale, straight, and he had a gold tooth which gleamed at Shane through the pale liquid. He put his glass down.

"No, you don't know me, fella. You don't know me and you don't wanna know me. I'm poison to some guys."

Shane looked at the ginger ale bottle. He said, "Punk," with a sort of hopeful expression, but the guy didn't want to make anything out of it, so Shane went out into the rain again.

There wasn't any attendant in the lot next door, not many cars. Shane went crunching over wet gravel, counting the cars subconsciously. Seemed like too many cars for the number of customers in Pop's, even if they were all singles. He peered into a couple of the cars, not looking for anything in particular, but just because he liked to know things, especially when mildly drunk.

He had to light a match to look into the fifth car, because the dashlight wouldn't turn on. Something wet and shiny was smeared on the rim of the steering wheel. Shane touched his finger to it, smelled the finger. The shiny stuff was blood. He lit another match and looked at the registration. It was Jim d'Arcy's car.

Gravel rattled behind him, and he spun, going for the gun under his arm. The gorilla with the gold tooth chopped downward. Shane hadn't seen the gun in the guy's hand, but he felt it. His hat might as well have been tissue paper for all the good it did. He tried to grapple, but his arms couldn't find anything to hold on to, and then the guy hit him again. He folded slowly, sort of in sections, before he finally sprawled out, full length, on the gravel.

By and by it seemed he was riding on a camel, or maybe it was one of the old Catalina boats with the channel rougher than usual. He opened his eyes and discovered he wasn't riding at all. He was in a car, but the car wasn't going anywhere. What was making his head bob like that was a guy shaking him by the shoulders. He looked at the guy and it wasn't the ginger-ale guzzler with the gold tooth. It was somebody else; somebody Shane had never seen before; a little mug with a screwed-up weasel face and hard little shoe-button eyes.

Shane coughed, "All right, you can stop now," and then he gagged a little, and Weasel-face yelped, "Hey, not in here!" and dragged Shane out of the car like a wet hawser.

AFTER a while Shane felt a little better. It was very dark, but it had stopped raining. There was a monotonous creaking and groaning going on and at first Shane thought it was his own head. Then he smelled the oil. This was a section of the old La Brea field and a few antiquated pumpers were still grinding it out. Off to his left shone the lights of Wilshire's Miracle Mile. He could see these even though he was flat on the ground. He could also see the little guy's feet, only they weren't close enough for him to reach.

Weasel-face said, very bored: "Okay, lug, if you're all through. You showed signs of comin' to life, and I didn't have nothing to tie you with, so I thought I'd better stop. You'll hafta do the drivin'."

"Don't apologize," Shane said. "It's quite all right." He rolled over in the mud, felt for his gun. It was gone. The little guy had one, though. He prodded Shane into the car with it, slid in after him, and

the gun buried itself in Shane's ribs as if it had found a permanent home. Shane switched the lights on. It was still Jim d'Arcy's car.

"Where to, maestro?"

"Just drive," said the little guy. "I'll tell you as we go along."

Shane went over to Wilshire. "Left," said the little guy. Shane turned left. He thought of asking what it was all about, decided it wouldn't do much good. This mug looked as if he might have a sense of humor, but it might be the wrong kind, and Shane's head was still kind of woozy. He wondered why he was still alive, why the little guy hadn't drilled him back there in the La Brea field. That would have been a nice quiet place.

So the answer was that somebody didn't want him dead. At least, not right away. Now, why do you suppose that was? Because Shane had something that somebody else wanted? He couldn't think of anything. Fact, it was pretty hard to think at all. He took a chance on the little guy's sense of humor. "What happened to the heavy with the gold headlight?"

"He had a date, copper." This very wearily, but the gun in Shane's ribs wasn't weary.

Shane studied the little guy obliquely. "I could stand a smoke, fella. Mind?"

"Not if you got one of your own. I need my hands, and speakin' of hands, you better keep at least one on the wheel where I can see it."

Shane fumbled a soggy cigarette from his right pocket, stuck it in his mouth and pretended he couldn't find a match. There was a lighter on the dash, so Shane leaned over the little guy's lap and got the lighter. His bent head snapped back, caught the little guy under the chin. The gun went off. Flame streaked along Shane's belly and the left hand window dissolved. Shane's head had had about all it could stand for awhile, though. It swelled up till the car wasn't big enough to hold it, and then it and the car and the whole world exploded together.

It seemed there were two cars and two light standards and two streets, and they were all painted red. No, that wasn't right. It was blood running down over Shane's eyes that made everything look red. He wiped the blood away with a sleeve of the trench coat. The two cars, etc., became one car and one light pole, but they weren't separate. It would take a wrecking truck to separate them.

Shane looked at the little guy. His head looked funny, as though it had been put on crooked. Shane tried to straighten it, and it wobbled loosely. The little guy wouldn't be using his head any more.

There were a couple of cars slowing up on the other side of the street, and down the boulevard a ways the ruby eye of a prowl car made a path for the siren. Shane went through the hood's pocket, picking up the gun on the seat and faded down an alley. Somebody yelled at him to stop, and a woman screamed shrilly, but Shane didn't wait. His legs felt rubbery, boneless, but he kept lifting his feet and putting them down again till he made it across to Pico. He sat down on the curb and waited for a cruising Yellow to show. One did, finally, and he got in, giving the address of his apartment.

HE found the lobby empty and he was glad of that, because if he looked half as bad as he felt, he wouldn't want even the clerk to see him. The automatic lift carried him up to the fourth, and he fitted his key into the lock without too much trouble; but before he twisted it, he took the little guy's gun out of his pocket and bent an ear to the door panel. He couldn't hear anything. Standing to one side, he pushed the door inward. Nothing happened. He reached in and switched the lights on.

Captain Udell was sitting in Shane's favorite chair. He had a police positive trained on Shane's flat middle and the look in his blood-shot eyes said he was aching to use it. There was another guy behind the door. Shane could hear him breathing.

Udell said: "Put the rod away, Shane. Put it away and come in. We've been waiting a long time for you."

Shane put the gun in the pocket of the trench coat. The guy behind the door closed it. He was a Hollywood dick, big,

carefully dressed. He had a slight cast in one eye, and it gave him a sort of waggish look. Shane went over to the bar against the wall and studied his face in the mirror while he poured himself a drink. They must have kicked him around a little after conking him back there at Pop's Place. He still didn't know why.

The drink made him shudder. He must have left the lining of his stomach back there in the oil field.

Udell got up and came over and took the gun out of Shane's pocket. He looked at it, tossed it to the other dick. "Same caliber, Whitey."

Whitey said, yes, it was the same caliber, and stared hard at Shane who asked, quite casually: "Well, what am I supposed to have done now?"

Udell lifted a huge fist, thought better of it. "Nope, I haven't the heart, even on a cop killer. Clean yourself up, shamus, and then we're taking a ride."

"So I'm a cop killer. Life's fondest ambition realized at last." Shane wondered which cop he was supposed to have killed. "Well, well, that calls for a bath." He wobbled into the bathroom, and the dick, Whitey, came and watched him run water into the tub. "Such privacy," Shane said. He pointed to the one small window. "Look, copper, I'm practically a shadow of my former self, but I'm not that thin. Would you mind very much getting the hell out of here?"

He closed the door, sat on the edge of the tub while he took off his shoes. The hot water helped a lot. Towelling, he thought of the stuff from the little guy's pockets, and got it out of the trench coat. Nothing that told him anything there.

He got into fresh underwear, shirt and socks, but he had to go through the living room to find another suit. Neither Udell nor Whitey said anything, just watched him climb into his trousers as if he were some new kind of worm. Shane was knotting his tie when the telephone rang.

Udell said: "Never mind, I'll take it," and lifted the phone. He listened without saying much, and Shane knew the call was from headquarters.

Shane said: "Nice of me to let you use my place for an office." Udell got up and came over. He was shaking, holding himself in with an effort. The little ruptured veins in his nose and cheeks were purple instead of red, and his small eyes were congested.

"Shane, the department has let you horse around pretty much as you pleased. I don't know why. But you're through now, washed up, you hear me? You're sweet on this Martha Young dame. You were out to the house tonight, found her in a jam. You couldn't get her away while we were there, but you came back later and took a chance with the guard I left. He tried to stop you, and you let him have it. All right, we've got you, but that doesn't solve the d'Arcy kill. We want Jim d'Arcy and the girl."

SHANE put his glass down very carefully. "I see. It wouldn't do any good if I told you I didn't kill the cop; that I don't know where either the girl or d'Arcy are?"

"Not a damned bit of good!" Udell brandished a meaty fist under Shane's nose. "That call I just got was about a guy with a broken neck in a car that belongs to Jim d'Arcy. The guy was only a cheap hood. Maybe he's responsible for the way your face looks, maybe it was the cop, but we've got you tied in with that car. Couple of witnesses saw you lamming."

"All right," Shane said, "I admit I was in the car. I even admit I broke the guy's neck. He and a big mug with a gold headlight started pushing me around. I don't know why."

Udell cursed him. "By damn, I've a notion to beat it out of you right here!" He measured Shane's length, nodded at the dick. Shane was pretty sure he couldn't take them both; not after the shellacking he'd already had. He sidled toward the bathroom door as the two started closing in.

He said, "Now, wait a minute. I gotta get some tape on my chin," and got inside. Udell came in right on his heels, and Shane dropped to his knees, got the skipper by the legs and tossed him over his shoulder into the tub. There was a tre-

mendous splash. Water hit the ceiling, showered down on Shane. Udell wallowed over on his back, bellowing. The other dick stuck his head through the door. Shane hit the head with a soggy bath towel. His feet slipped on the wet tile and he fell flat as the dick got the towel out of his eyes. The dick was still holding the little hood's gun. He lifted it, squeezed the trigger just as Shane yanked his legs out from under him.

The slug crashed the ceiling light. The guy's head bounced up and Shane pushed it down again, hard, got the gun, rolled over. Udell, coming out of the tub like a water buffalo, missed him and sprawled flat on top of the dick. Shane tapped him, just once, with the gun. Udell and the dick were both out cold.

It was quite a job to slide them both into the bathroom, but he got it done finally and, reversing the key, locked the door. After that he went to a closet and got another trench coat, exactly like the first, just as shabby, only it didn't have any mud on it. He put this on, found another hat down among the shoes and put that on. Udell and Whitey were making quite a racket in the bath now.

Shane went out into the hall and closed the door. The two old maids who lived across the hall were shrieking bloody murder. He could still hear them when he got down to the alley. It was raining again. He had to walk four blocks before he found a box to phone for a taxi. Waiting there in the shadows, he watched three prowl cars converge on the apartment house, go away again. The taxi came and he gave the man the address of Pop's Place on Sunset. Inside, he lifted his feet to the seat, folded long arms around bony knees and tried to concentrate. It was pretty hard, concentrating, when you didn't know exactly what to concentrate on, and when your head ached like seven elephants had stepped on it, and your stomach was sandpapered raw inside. Not to mention the bullet furrow on the outside from the little guy's gun.

Let's see, now. Young Jim d'Arcy knifed his old man; he was a wiz with a knife and the guy that did the job had certainly known what it was all about. Thumb forward along the half and jab upward. Martha, or somebody who didn't have the savvy, would have held it thumb backward and struck down. Okay, so Jim d'Arcy did it. The gal knew he did it. She'd stayed, though, hoping to cover him.

But she didn't know where he had lammed to. Otherwise, she wouldn't have asked Shane to find him. Shane sat up at the thought. Of course! He, Shane, had said he wouldn't help; wouldn't have any part of it. So Martha had tried to find Jim d'Arcy, herself. The cop on guard had tried to stop her and she'd—

Shane cursed. He could see Martha, intent on doing something, pretty worried, and some big flat-foot trying to give her an argument. Hell of a mess, this. The fact that there was more than likely a general alarm out for Shane himself didn't worry him much. He grinned a little, thinking of Captain Udell having apoplexy back there in the bathroom. And that brought him to the little guy with the big gun, and the beppo with the gold headlight. They didn't fit, somehow. Shane floundered around in a mental fog, trying to make them fit, and finally arrived at a very funny conclusion. It was so funny that he chuckled aloud, and the driver turned around and scowled at him for putting his feet on the upholstery.

THEY pulled up in front of Pop's Place, and it was still open, but there weren't any customers. "Drive on by," Shane said. He looked over the parking lot as they went past, saw his own car and another, probably the bartender's. He got out, paid off, and walked back on the opposite side of the street. The barkeep was beginning to turn off the lights. That meant three o'clock.

Shane crossed over, opened the door. "Wait a minute, Jerry. I want to use the phone. And mix me up something hot, something with a coupla eggs in it, hunh?"

Jerry's eyes popped. "Jeez, Shane! Jeez, don't you know you're hot? Cops've been drillin' around ever since you left. They're lookin' for you, fella."

Shane said: "Thanks. Put plenty of bourbon in it, Jerry." He folded himself into the booth, closed the door, and dialed the *Tribune*. The paper had been on the streets for hours, but this was quicker. When he came out of the booth he was whistling between his teeth. Not because he was particularly happy, but because certain things like the little guy and the big guy and the dead copper and so on were beginning to fit. He held the steaming mug in both hands so they'd get warm, too.

Jerry kept looking at him, and looking out of the window, and muttering to himself.

Shane said: "The big yegg that drinks his ginger ale straight. Know him, Jerry?"

Jerry didn't. He went on mopping up behind the bar and wishing Shane would get the hell out. A car nosed into the curb. Shane saw the insignia on the door panel and went out the back way just as the two harness bulls came in the front. He could hear Jerry trying to stall them. He must remember to do something nice for Jerry sometime. Loping around the corner of the building, he got his car started and away before the cops found out they were being stalled.

THE d'Arcy house looked about the same. You'd never know that a great columnist and a not-so-great dick had met death there in the last three or four hours. The street lights only made the shadows seem blacker, and giant pepper trees had dripped rain and berries till the pavement was slushy under the trees. Shane drove around the block, looking for a possible stake-out. There wasn't any. He parked under a tree, mounted the porch and rang the bell. He didn't have to wait long. The porch light winked on, and the housekeeper opened the door on a chain. She looked lumpy in a too big flannel robe, and her eyes were puffy-red.

Shane took off his hat so she could see him better. "I'm Shane," he said. "You remember me?" She looked at him dully, as if she didn't, and he added: "I'm Martha's friend, and Jim d'Arcy's. I was here last night."

She bobbed her head. "I remember, but they're not here. Nobody's here but me."

He tried again: "Look, you'd like to help Martha and Jim, wouldn't you?"

Something flickered in the dull eyes. He couldn't tell what it was, but decided he might as well call it hope as anything. He had to get inside and he couldn't very well just barge in, not while the chain was on the door, so he said: "Well, that's just fine then. You want to help them, I want to help them. Two of the world's greatest little helpers, working together for the commonweal." She didn't think he was funny, so he scowled at her. "How's about undoing that chain?"

"You mean you want in?"

"That's the general idea, lady. I've got to have a look at one or two items in d'Arcy's office, and maybe Martha's, before I know just how helpful you and I are going to be."

She undid the chain, fastened it very carefully again, and then padded felt-soled slippers down the hall after him. He went into d'Arcy's office, looked all through the desk without finding what he was after, went down the hall to Martha's more business-like office. There was a steel filing cabinet against the wall, another smaller one on Martha's desk, Invariably, down in the lower left hand corner of the carbons, he found Martha's initials bracketed with Guy d'Arcy's. But again he didn't find what he was looking for. Maybe the *Tribune* had been right, after all, and that thought was discouraging.

So, being Shane, he grinned cheerfully, if somewhat lopsidedly, and went back to d'Arcy's study. Funny, he'd left the lights on in there and now they were off. The air was fresher, too. Thinking the housekeeper had doused the lights, he reached in for the switch. Flame laced the darkness and something hot plucked at an ear lobe. He sprawled flat as gun-roar caromed crazily around the room. He got out the little guy's gun and squeezed lead out of it. There was a yelp, a couple more shots. Shane squeezed more lead at the flashes. Glass tinkled behind drawn

drapes. It was darker than the inside of a whale in the room, light out in the hall, and Shane knew if he stood up he'd make a swell target. Still, he wasn't getting anywhere this way. He wondered where the housekeeper was. By rights, she ought to be yelping her head off, and he hadn't heard a peep out of her.

He tilted his gun up from the floor, held it wide, and took another shot, sort of exploring the unknown. There wasn't any answer, so he wiggled along on his belly till he was all in the room, doubled over and reached for the wall switch. The lights came on. Save for himself, the room was empty. The drapes over the windows billowed gently and he went over and whipped them apart. The guy, whoever he was, was gone. There was only a little spatter of blood on the sill to show that he'd ever been there.

SHANE went looking for the housekeeper. She was a huddle of blue flannel on the polished floor of the hall, and Shane thought at first that she'd only fainted. Then he saw the slowly-spreading stain up near the top of the bathrobe and was afraid she'd stopped one of the slugs meant for him. Then he saw that her slippers were wet, and lifting his eyes, found the door chain hanging straight down. There was a gun in the pocket of the blue flannel robe. It was still hot and there were three empty shells.

So there hadn't been any guy. The woman had let him go down the hall alone, had then gone out the front door and around to the windows so she could pot him from darkness while he was outlined against the light. That way, she'd have an alibi in case she missed. Not very confident with a gun, apparently, and shy of tackling him inside with the breaks even. Funny, maybe this dumpy old woman had even knifed d'Arcy.

Shane found her pulse strong. He pulled the robe down from her shoulder. The wound was clean, high up. Shane decided it was shock, mostly, that had keeled her over as she got back inside the hall. He felt kind of quivery, looking at her. He had never shot a woman before.

He sat there, hunkered down on his haunches, wondering what to do about her. He could wait and take a chance on making her talk, or he could leave and check on his hunch. The hunch was stronger than ever now. With all this killing going on, and seemingly everybody in town hooked into it, time was apt to be pretty important. Besides, some of the neighbors would have called the law by now. Shane didn't want any cops underfoot. He reached for his gun, and somebody said: "Leave it lay, mug!"

The big guy with the gold headlight was standing in the front door. He had two guns. Shane looked at him, looked at the dumpy woman on the floor beside him. Except for the gold tooth there was quite a resemblance. The guy came down the hall and kicked Shane in the side and stood glooming down at the woman.

Shane grunted from the kick, but the phenomenon was so amazing that he had to say, "Your mother, hunh?" and that brought on another kick. The big guy had pale eyes, and Shane thought of a leopard he'd once shot, only this time it was the leopard who was going to do the shooting. The guy was trying to make up his mind. Wrinkles of indecision creased his low forehead, and Shane could almost approximate the mental processes. Would there be time to lug both Shane and the old lady out? There wouldn't. The two guns cut down on Shane. His own was at least three feet away. He couldn't make it, and he knew he couldn't, and then the acute discomfort under his hip resolved itself into the woman's gun.

He flattened and rolled as the two guns blasted above him. A slug meant for his chest, caught him in the shoulder and then, somehow, his fingers hooked the gun under him. He fired, and the flame of his own shot seared his lean belly. He squeezed the trigger again and nothing happened. The rod was empty. Well, this is it, he thought, and looked up to face it.

Surprised, he saw the two guns falling out of the big guy's hands. He couldn't have done all that with one slug. And then the guy's knees started buckling and, looking higher, Shane saw the

hole in the mug's jaw. There didn't seem to be any top to the head, though, and on account of the blood Shane couldn't even see the gold tooth any more.

IT was a very messy job frisking the guy, and when he got all through Shane didn't know any more than he'd known before. The woman slept through it all. He got up and wobbled out the front door as the first siren swung into the street. A man across the way was leaning out of a second story window. He had a night-cap on, and he kept yelling: "Halt, there! Halt, or I'll fire!"

Shane couldn't see that the guy had anything to fire with; both the flailing fists were empty, so he didn't halt. The guy changed the record to: "There he goes! There he goes!"

Shane slammed the coupe door, cursing guys who didn't mind their own business. Especially guys that wore night-caps. Driving one-handed because his left arm was numb and so was most of his left side, he tore down the street. The siren couldn't make up its mind whether to stop at the house or chase Shane. It finally came on, and Shane wasted a perfectly good fifteen minutes losing it. He then went to an all-night drug store, looked up an address in the phone book, bought a roll of bandage and a quart bottle of rye. The label said it was good stuff. He drove on till he found a nice comfortable shadow, drank some of the whiskey, poured some on a wad of gauze and plugged up the hole in his shoulder When he got through with that his teeth ached from biting down so hard.

He took another drink, for luck, and stoppered the bottle very carefully. Mustn't lose any. The way he felt, he could tell he was going to need every drop. He drove out to the address on Carthay Circle, and it was one of those places they call town estates. It occupied most of a city block. A high iron fence surrounded acres of heavily-shrubbed, terraced lawn; and there was a swimming pool and a tennis court. Ornamental lights, placed strategically about the grounds, told Shane all this, but for the moment he was more interested in the gates.

They weren't locked, so he opened them and drove up the curving drive till he was under the porte cochere. Even the coupe lowered its throaty rumble as though shrinking in upon itself amid such splendor. None of the windows showed light; there was none behind the ground glass door panel, either. That meant that everybody was in for the night.

Shane pushed the button, leaning on it heavily and keeping his finger there till the door glowed yellow. The door opened on a chain, and a voice, dead with sleep and just a trifle irritated, said: "Who is it, please?"

Shane said: "Telegram."

The guy unhooked the chain, and Shane kneed the door inward. He closed the door behind him. The butler was on the floor where the door had hurled him, both hands nursing a bumped nose. He eyed the gun in Shane's fist, opened his mouth, like a fish.

Shane made a suggestive gesture. "If you're thinking about yelling, I wouldn't."

The man closed his mouth, opened it again immediately, but he didn't yell. He mumbled, sort of piteously, "This—this is most unusual!" There was outraged dignity and righteous indignation and horrible fear all mixed up in his voice. He got to his feet. He'd pulled on trousers over his pajamas, but the braces were hanging about his hips and it kept both hands busy holding the trousers up. He mumbled again: "Most unusual!"

"I know," Shane said sympathetically. "Like our California weather. Now, look, fella, I'm sorry about the nose, and I don't want to hurt you any more if I can help it. See what I mean?"

The guy was smart. He got the idea right away.

Shane said: "Swell. Now which is Mrs. Lowden's suite?"

Fish-face opened his mouth, wide this time, and there was stark horror in the bulgy eyes. "You—you're not going to harm the mistress!"

"I may." Shane was getting pretty tired now. He couldn't waste much more

time on this mug. "I asked you which room?"

"S-s-second floor, front, right!"

"Thank you," Shane said. "Now turn around and go right on holding your pants up till you're inside that coat closet under the stairs." He stuck the gun in the butler's back and marched him into the closet. "Now," he said, "just make yourself at home, and don't yell, and maybe somebody will come and let you out after a while." He shut the door and locked it. There wasn't a sound anywhere in the house.

THICK carpet muffled his steps as he climbed. He had to put his gun in his pocket, and hold on to the bannister with his good hand to make it, though. In spite of the plug, the blood kept trickling down his left leg and was slowly filling his shoe. He opened the door of the front room. A woman's voice asked: "Is that you, Jessup? Who was at the door?" A night light glowed.

Shane reached in, found the wall switch. The great crystal chandelier in the ceiling burst into scintillating light. He stood there in the doorway, swaying slightly. "No," he said, "it isn't Jessup."

The woman in the bed gave a little choked scream, and Shane took out his gun unhurriedly and pointed it at her. It was a big bed, with a white satin canopy over it. The whole room was done in white and off-shades of white, and the white rug was so deep you felt like you were sinking to your ankles. Shane hoped he wouldn't get any blood on it.

The woman just lay back against the pillows, mouth open slightly, but not saying anything, watching Shane and the gun with a sort of unbelieving fascination. She had a chin strap on and the flesh bulged around it, like wattles, but her hair was still black. Dyed, maybe. The jewels on her fingers caught the light from the chandelier in a million refractions.

Shane went over to the great bed, sat on the edge of it. He laid the hand with the gun on top of the satin coverlet so that the muzzle pointed at her fat throat. He could hold it steadier that way. There was a little blood on the hand. The woman's eyes rolled up in her head when she saw the blood.

He said: "I'm Shane. Maybe that doesn't mean anything to you, though. Does it?"

Her whisper, no, barely reached him. The wattles quivered like jelly.

He said: "Mrs. Lowden, I haven't much time, so you must pay very careful attention to what I say, believing that I mean every word. There have been several men killed tonight over a matter which seems rather silly. The matter originally concerned yourself and Gino Marchetti. It now concerns me, and is no longer silly. I intend to kill you, here and now, unless you can stop Gino."

She got her voice back then. "I don't know what you mean."

Shane said: "I'm pretty sure you do know what I mean, but if you don't, I'll just have to kill you anyway."

She must have believed him then. Perhaps he believed himself. The veil of cunning dropped from her eyes for an instant and stark fear showed. Fat, beringed fists clutching her throat, she gasped, "What do you want me to do?"

"Call Gino Marchetti."

She reached for the white phone on the night stand, jerked the tasselled bell-cord instead. Far below a bell jangled.

SHANE didn't move. He said: "The butler can't come, Mrs. Lowden."

She spat at him. And then, very slowly, hoping against hope that he was wrong, she began dialing a number. The bell rang for a long time at the other end. Shane could hear it. Presently the bell stopped ringing and a voice answered.

"Marchetti!" she jittered. "Marchetti, there is a man here who is going to kill me if I don't stop you. Stop you what? What have you been doing?" The voice rattled, and she said: "Shane, I think. Of course he means it, you fool! He looks like he's already killed a dozen!" She looked at Shane. "What do you want?"

Shane said: "Ask him if d'Arcy and the girl are still alive. Tell him that if they aren't, I'll look him up after I finish you." The gun in his hand kept jumping

nervously, making little satin waves in the shimmering satin. He couldn't seem to control it.

The woman shivered. She spoke into the phone again, listened, relayed the message to Shane. D'Arcy and the girl were still alive. "What do you want done with them?"

Shane thought: I can't make it with her, and even if I did, Marchetti would find some way to cross me. He said: "Tell him to put d'Arcy and Martha in a cab and send them here. He can tell the girl I'm waiting for her. As soon as I know they're safe, you and he can take a powder, or do anything else you want. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal," said Mrs. Lowden. She spoke into the phone, crisply now. "I've made a deal, Marchetti. Turn them loose."

After that, they just sat and watched each other while the gun kept doing tricks on the counterpane. Out in the street, a car door slammed, and feet came up the drive, a man's and a girl's. To the woman in the bed Shane said: "I'm going to get up now, but I'm not leaving the room. Slide down under the covers please."

"You're—you won't shoot me if I do?"

"I won't shoot you if you do."

Her eyes hated him, but she believed. She disappeared, like a turtle, and Shane piled pillows on top of her. He backed to the windows, swept the hangings aside and called out: "Upstairs, Martha. Where you see the lights."

"Coming, Michael!" Lots of character in that voice, Shane thought. No silly questions, just: "Coming, Michael!" Lots of character in the girl, too. Shane wished he had a little. He watched the lump in the middle of the great bed. It didn't move till Martha and d'Arcy came in.

Martha flew to Shane. "Michael, you're hurt!"

"A little," he admitted. "Nothing serious, Martha." He pushed her from him, looked at d'Arcy. "Anybody follow you here?"

D'Arcy said no, they hadn't been followed, and Gino Marchetti said, "You're mistaken," and fired from the doorway. The slug took Shane's hat off. He sat down, quite suddenly, as if he had been pushed, and propped his gun on a knee. Marchetti dodged behind Martha, and d'Arcy, unarmed, made a flying tackle for Marchetti's legs.

He got them. Marchetti belted him on the head with the gun, and the gun was all Shane could see beyond Martha, so he shot at that. The gun went flying, and Martha dropped to the floor. Shane got up, started for Marchetti, and the round man's hand flashed up and around to the back of his neck. It came out with a knife. The blade twinkled reflections from the crystal chandelier, twinkled its flight clear across the room.

Shane fell down again, and the woman in the bed stopped screaming. Shane pumped slugs at Marchetti till there weren't any more, and Gino Marchetti lay like a great round ball on the white rug. Too bad about the rug, Shane thought. It was going to get stained, after all.

GRINNING shame-facedly, d'Arcy got up. "Stout fella, Shane. You, I mean, not Marchetti." He bent over Martha, and Shane wobbled up to see why Mrs. Wentworth Lowden had stopped screaming. The knife in her breast winked at Shane. Mrs. Lowden didn't know the knife was in her breast. She never would, now.

There was a lot of noise out in the hall, and Shane got a dizzy, panoramic view of white faces and nighties and things, and then they all melted away to make room for Captain Udell. He puffed in as if he'd run all the way from Hollywood, and the veins in his nose and cheeks were a sort of magenta, now. He came and stood spraddle-legged over Shane in the white chair.

"Okay, shamus, spill it fast before I forget how sick you look."

"I'll make a deal," said Shane. "You tell me first."

He thought Udell was going to have a stroke. So did Martha. She came and stood beside Shane, protectively, but she didn't say anything. Udell growled: "Okay, okay. We got to d'Arcy's housekeeper, and when she found her so-and-so

of a son was dead, she broke down and admitted he worked for Marchetti. I beat it out to Gino's, saw him sneaking out, and tailed him here."

Shane smiled. "All right, it's all yours, copper. You can have all the glory, if any. I've got what I want. Seems Guy d'Arcy stumbled into a connection between the lady over there in the bed, and Gino Marchetti. They were partners. They owned a string of big-time gambling houses. Really big. She knew everybody, went everywhere, and I can see where her position in society would make her invaluable to a smart guy like Gino. She shilled the rich suckers in and Gino fleeced them. Only thing is, her value would cease the minute a breath of suspicion touched her. People would begin to remember how she'd suggested a friendly fling at roulette several times. And they'd also remember losing several nice chunks of cash.

"Well, d'Arcy was going to put more than a breath of suspicion in his column. He knew, and Marchetti knew that he knew, so Gino had to stop him. Gino got out to the house just in time to hear the last of the quarrel between father and son. When young d'Arcy beat it, Marchetti went in, probably through the windows, though the housekeeper may have let him in. D'Arcy had the column transcription and the carbon on his desk. And that column spilled the works.

"Marchetti jabbed d'Arcy with the paper knife, lammed with the script. Then he got to thinking it would be a swell idea to pick up young d'Arcy. It was possible he, too, might know what was in the script, and even if he didn't, his absence would point him out as the killer."

Jim d'Arcy nodded. "All straight, so far. I was wild when I left dad, started out on a bender. They knocked me on the head as I was leaving Pop's Place. I don't know what became of my car, though."

Shane said: "Your car won't be much good any more. I wrecked it for you. Last I saw of it, it was all mixed up with a lamp post."

Udell snorted. "Save it, save it."

Shane could see the skipper was still sore, so he said, "Unh, well, I'm sorry about the bath tub and all, but when you told me they'd got Martha—well, you see how it is, hunh?"

Udell made sour noises in his throat.

Shane said: "Yes. Well, guys had been pushing me around all night, and I couldn't see why until they grabbed Martha. I wasn't sure she'd been grabbed, of course. She might have run out. But I remembered mentioning to Marchetti that I'd heard about him and Mrs. Wentworth Lowden; also that I was looking for Jim d'Arcy. Maybe that was the reason I'd been tailed. I called the *Tribune*, and they said they'd never got the script from d'Arcy; said he'd been killed before he wrote it, which wasn't possible because I'd heard the stuff on his dictaphone."

Udell said: "His dictaphone was empty."

"*His* was," Shane said, "but the duplicate machine in Martha's office held a record of the column."

"Why you—"

"Now, skipper," Shane said, wagging a long finger, "let's not start bickering again."

MARTHA smiled down at Shane. "Smart boy, Michael. I typed that column, put it on his desk before ten o'clock, but I kind of forgot it after that."

Shane went on in a weary voice. He was tired—so tired he could have keeled over right there. "Gino thought he had everything till he discovered Martha's initials down at the bottom of the pages. Then he knew the stuff had been dictated. He sent the guy with the gold headlight after Martha, and it would have been all right, seeing the guy's mother was the housekeeper, only he ran into the dick. Goldie let the dick have it.

"So they got Martha. I imagine she told them the stuff was on a record, too, so back came Goldie after the record. Meantime, his old lady knew I was working for d'Arcy and Martha, and that meant I was inimical to her darling son's interests, so damned if even she didn't take a shot at me."

Udell's mustache bristled, but he wasn't mad any more. Only interested in the clean-up now. "Okay, okay," he said briskly, "but why come after the Lowden dame?"

"Because I figured her as the head; because I didn't think I was big enough to take Gino and all his little playmates in his own territory. This way, I could make a deal, and I did." He bobbed his head, carefully, toward the dowager in the white satin bed. "'It's a deal,' she said, and I think she meant it, only she was trying to deal for Marchetti too, and that's the thanks he gave her. It was meant for me, but her luck must have run out."

Shane grinned his crooked grin at Udell, and tried to keep his eyes away from Martha and d'Arcy. He wished Martha had looked at him like that, just once. And then she was looking at Shane, and it was a different look, but clear-eyed, unafraid. She was coming over to him now, ready to pay off as she'd said she would, and he liked her for that. Lots of character.

She helped him get to his feet, steadied him with her hands. "It's a deal, Michael. The answer is yes."

He pushed her away and nearly fell down. D'Arcy came over then, and Shane executed a swell grin for them both. "It's a deal, yes, but it's between you and d'Arcy, Martha. If I remember rightly, I said the hell with it." His voice sounded kind of mushy and it felt like there was a frog in his throat, so he sneered at Marchetti, 'way down there on the white rug, and went down the stairs into the rain. Seemed like the damn' rain would never stop, but there was enough rye left in the bottle to wash the lump out of his throat, anyway.

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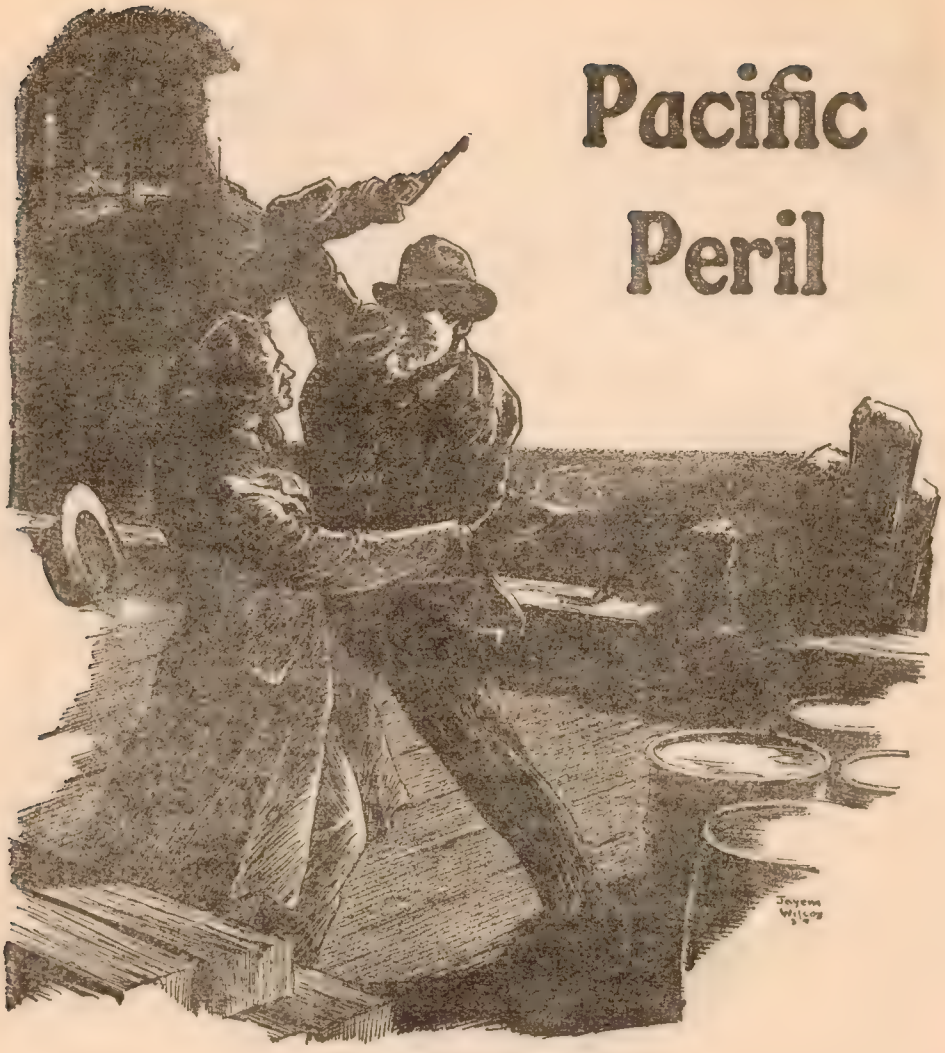

By Howard J. Perry

The tuna clipper carried two strange passengers — a spy who had to live to serve his country and a G-man who had to die for his. And each held the fate of the other at his finger-tips, but neither could make the first move.

SPECIAL Agent Tom Breck of the Federal Bureau of Investigation circled his desk again before he picked up the letter and walked to the small window overlooking the fog shrouded buildings of downtown San Francisco.

For a long time he stared into the murky sky. Then he lowered his eyes and reread the neat feminine writing:

Dear Tom:

They said you might be back this week so I'm writing this hurried note to you in the hope you will get it before you have to leave again. Tom, I'm terribly worried about

TDA

Larry. It has been days since I have heard from him; and, as you know, the bureau won't give out any information, even to wives. Can't you find out something? I hate to bother you, but you have been both brother and father to Larry and me. This suspense is getting me. The most horrible dreams wake me in the night, and every time the telephone rings I nearly collapse. If you could only get some word about Larry and call or write. Your loving sister. . . . Ruth.

Breck's long hard fingers crumpled the letter into a tight wad. Dammit! The Bureau was no place for a young married man. The regulations ought to specify that. Yet it was his own fault that Larry Travis was in the service. And it was through him that Larry had met Ruth, and he had been glad when they fell in love. They didn't make them any better than Larry. He had tried to talk him out of joining the service. He knew the heartaches and fears there would be in it for Ruth. But nothing he said could change the boy's mind.

Breck circled the room once more. There was only one way he could get Larry out of it—by quitting himself. If he quit, Larry would follow—they'd been pals too long to split. Breck sighed. He'd do something, and do it right away. He would locate Larry as soon as he could and tell the service they could . . . .

The phone buzzed on his desk.

"Mr. Breck, Mr. Redfield would like to see you," the voice of the chief's secretary announced.

"Okay," Breck said and laid down the receiver slowly. He went out and down the hall.

The girl looked up and smiled impersonally as he came in. "Go right in, Mr. Breck."

Redfield lifted his big frame out of his chair and leaned across the desk, extending his hand.

"Glad to see you, Tom . . . . damn glad!"

Breck smiled. "I generally show up."

"Yeah," said Redfield, sitting down again and motioning to a chair at the corner of his desk. "Yeah, you did a great job up there in Montana."

"Thanks," said Breck. "It wasn't so tough, but it had a lot of angles. Kidnaping always does. Do you want a verbal report now?"

Redfield shook his head. "No, write it out at your convenience." He pushed the button on his desk and the girl appeared at the door. "Miss Gray, I won't see anyone until Mr. Breck leaves."

He waited until she closed the door, then fixed his somber gaze upon Breck.

"Well, Tom," he began in a lowered voice. "The thing we've feared has happened. You know all this talk about the Surasian Intelligence—Navy spies and what not operating on the Pacific Coast?"

Breck nodded. "The old bugaboo again?"

"It isn't a bugaboo, Tom. I wish it was. There's some genuine fire beneath all the smoke. I'll give you all the information I have. Some of it doesn't tie and some of it doesn't make sense. But what happened yesterday is enough to scare the devil out of the big shots in Washington."

REDFIELD pulled his chair closer. "For several months now," he said, "there's been a leak in our immigration service or a weakness in the border patrol, because a group of Surasians has been coming and going in some mysterious manner that has got everyone baffled. The immigration department has called for help."

"Any particular type?" Breck asked.

Redfield nodded. "A smart lot—not laborers. They move under cover, appearing first in Washington and then in Seattle or in Los Angeles. Then the next thing we hear is that they've been seen across the Pacific. How they get in and out nobody knows, but it's time we found out."

"Probably slip across the Mexican border," Breck observed.

Redfield shook his head. "The patrol has been tripled, but what is more important is that our agents in Mexico have neither seen nor heard anything of this bunch—and the government knows

everything that is coming and going in Mexican ports."

Breck said: "Yeah, we know all about Mexican ports and go to sleep on our own docks."

"Most likely," Redfield admitted. "But here's something that may or may not tie in with the Surasian activities. For some time now there has been a lot of heavy buying of TNT from explosive manufacturers. Not any large amounts at one time, but a lot of small orders from various branches throughout the country. As far as can be learned most of the shipments are finding their way into Southern California. Then it disappears."

"Oughtn't to be hard to trace it," Breck said.

"I know it shouldn't, but the department feels that this would be going at it backwards. By the time we traced down every little shipment, anyone connected with it would know we were suspicious. We've decided to get at the top first." Redfield's fist clenched on the desk. "There's a key man, Breck—get him and we get everything."

Tom Breck knew what was coming. Here was his chance to decide his future —and Larry's. Now was the time to resign. He'd break the news to Redfield now.

"But," said the chief, leaning back in his chair, "here's the latest development. That's why I called you in. Hell broke loose last night. The War Plans office of the Eleventh Naval District at San Diego was entered last night and some important information stolen."

Breck sat up and whistled. "Know what it was?"

"Yes. They got away with all the dope on a new mine that can be placed in the water and remain harmless even when struck by a ship, but which can be made immediately sensitive by radio control. It's a new bureau of standards invention."

"I didn't see any mention of it in the morning papers," Breck said.

"No, it was kept a secret. Washington called me and asked me to put one man —my best—on it."

Breck was thinking fast. He couldn't quit now just when they needed him, but —hell! There were other good men. Besides there was Larry and Ruth. He had a right to consider them. He cleared his throat.

"I want you to leave by plane at once," Redfield said. "And here's something else that I hate to bring up at this time, but it affects you and you ought to know about it. Perhaps you can throw some light on it when you get to San Diego. One of the workmen in a tuna cannery fell off the dock and drowned. The local police found a code book in his pocket. They notified me, and I sent Larry Travis down to see about it. But Larry —" he paused.

Tom Breck's jaw tightened. He sat forward in his chair. "Yes, what? Go on!"

Redfield said with reluctance: "He was too much of a kid for this kind of work, I guess. We didn't hear from him for a few days, and then the San Diego police reported that they had picked him up drunk on the waterfront. When they tried to arrest him, he slugged one of the officers and got away with the help of a couple of foreigners. We haven't heard from him since."

Tom Breck stood up. His steel-cut eyes flashed. "That's a damned lie!" he exploded.

Redfield started. "Easy, Tom, you're not the kind to go off half-cocked."

"I am any time Larry Travis is accused of anything like that," he snapped.

"That's why I told you, Tom," Redfield said. "You can look into it down there. I thought a lot of Larry. I'd like to believe different."

Tom Breck's face never relaxed. "I'll take the next plane."

Redfield handed him a correspondence file. "Read this stuff before you go. When you get down there report to Admiral Farnsworth, commandant of the district. I'll send word you're coming." His voice filled with sudden emotion. "Remember, Tom, this theft must be solved. Less than this has caused war."

Back in his office, Breck called the airport. There would be a plane in two hours. He just had time to read the reports on the case.

HE arrived in San Diego in the late afternoon and walked from the airport along the waterfront to the building that housed the executive staff of the Eleventh Naval District.

The harbor drowsed in the setting sun. Sleek gray cruisers and low built destroyers rode at anchor on the glistening bay. Above North Island across the harbor, Navy aircraft wheeled and circled in the blue sky.

The smell of fish came to him as he passed the great tuna canneries where stub-nosed tuna clippers unloaded their tropical catch at the long wharfs.

On the second floor of the district building, he entered the aide's office. A sharp featured man with a commander's insignia on his blue sleeve looked at him curiously.

"I'd like to see Admiral Farnsworth," Breck said.

"Did you have an appointment?"

Breck shook his head. "No definite time, but he'll see me. Breck is the name."

The aide went through the door and returned a moment later. "This way," he said.

Behind a large mahogany desk sat a small gray-haired man in neat civilian clothes. He wore a look of worry on his face as Breck came towards him.

The aide followed and stood by the desk.

"Admiral Farnsworth," Breck said. "I came here from San Francisco to talk with you." He glanced at the aide.

"All right, Mr. Atkins," the admiral said. The aide moved slowly to the door.

Breck waited in silence until the door closed. Then he spoke.

"I'm the special agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I have been assigned to the matter of the theft of the plans."

Some of the worry left the face of the man. "You are needed. If those plans and specifications get across the Pacific, there is no telling what will happen."

"I understand your concern, admiral," Breck said. "Tell me, who has access to this building at night?"

"Besides the Marine guard, there is a watchman in charge with time clocks on all the floors. Anyone else must have a pass."

"Did anyone enter with a pass last night?"

"No one."

"Did you question the watchman?"

"Yes, I talked with him without letting him know what had happened. He said that there wasn't anyone about the place."

"Who is he?"

"His name's John Carter. He's a retired petty officer with a fine service record. Married and has several married children. He has been night watchman here for twelve years."

"And the men in the War Plans office?"

"Commander Ewing is in charge. Perfect record. Oddly enough he was the only officer there yesterday. Lieutenant Fish was on leave of absence. Ewing placed the plans in the safe himself yesterday afternoon. One of the officers from the quartermaster department was in the room and saw him put them there. Ewing was the first to enter the office this morning. Marine Captain Casey was with him. They found the safe door blown off."

Breck stood up and the admiral looked a little surprised.

"You're not going so soon?" he asked. "Don't you want more details?"

"If I do, I'll come to you, sir," said Breck. "Right now I'm going to look around and will question the watchman when he comes on duty. Will you send word to him? Tell him I'm a naval inspector checking all watchmen. I don't want anyone to know I'm here, but I may have to have help. How may I communicate with you?"

The admiral reached in his desk and took out a sheet of paper. "You know something about codes?"

"We have to," said Breck.

"Well, this is a number code using the calendar for a key. It's not safe with experts, but it's proof against the curious."

Breck took the paper. He had deciphered those before, but they weren't easy.

The admiral went with him to the door and shook hands.

BRECK walked up Broadway and registered at the first hotel, under the name of Clayton. He paid a week in advance. Then after eating, he strolled back to the waterfront. It was after six o'clock and already dark.

Unless the night-watchman could give him a tip, it looked like he was up against a blank wall as far as immediate action was concerned—and there was need for something immediate. His mind kept reverting to Larry. Was it possible the boy had gone bad? No. He refused to believe it. Yet Redfield wasn't one to accept a report unless it was fact.

The district building was dark. He walked around to the side where a light showed through the upper glass of a door. Breck pressed the night bell. Presently down the long dimly lit hall a fleshy old man waddled. He unlocked the door and peered curiously at Breck.

"John Carter?" Breck asked.

"That's my name."

"I'm the inspector the admiral sent word about. I'm making an inspection of all the naval districts."

Carter opened the door. Breck stepped by him. As he half-turned to wait for the old man, he heard three distinct metallic coughs. Carter clutched at his heart with a strangled cry and pitched forward on his face.

Breck leaped over the prostrate figure and into the street. A shadowy form dashed off into the darkness towards the waterfront. Breck bolted after it. It didn't take much reasoning to tell him that the man with that silencer on his gun was a mighty important clue to the theft of the war plans.

The racing figure turned towards the barn-like fish canneries. In the darkness Breck could barely make out their dim shapes. He put on a burst of speed, but the man ahead disappeared among the buildings.

Holding close to the deep shadows, Breck moved forward until he could see the end of the dock extending out into the bay. Pilot houses and upper decks of three tuna clippers were outlined against the horizon. From one of the boats a light glowed.

There were oil barrels and packing cases enough to afford Breck an opportunity to keep under cover until he was near the boat with the light. Voices came to his ear as he neared—voices low and harsh.

Breck decided to have a look. The deck was level with the dock. Stepping closer he saw that the cabin window was open. There were several dark complexioned men sitting around the table. At one end another swayed in drunken fashion. He was shouting incoherently. But his voice! It drove all else from Breck's mind. He lost his iron composure. With it went his necessary caution. He stepped out into the open.

He was right! The drunken, swaying, loud-spoken individual was Larry Travis.

His face was puffed and his clothes were in rags. The others, unmistakably of Surasian blood, were highly amused with his talk.

What had happened to the boy? Breck had to get to him, had to take him out of this. He stepped forward. But a terrific blow on the back of his head stayed him. Tight arms entwined about his body. The planking of the dock struck him in the face. Then came blackness.

BRECK'S mind cleared slowly and with painful throbs. There was a steady low throb that he first thought was his heart. He was lying on something hard and it was swaying. He tried to move but he couldn't. His wrists and ankles were tied.

The smell of fish and bilge water struck his nostrils. His eyes were open but they met only blackness. He lay still and listened. The throbbing wasn't his heart. It was an engine—sounded like a

diesel. Now he knew. He was on a boat and it was moving.

What a swell mess he had made of things. No telling where this boat was heading. And Larry and the Navy thieves back there in San Diego.

He turned his attention to his wrists. It would have to be a damn good bit of tying that he couldn't wriggle out of if he had time. He put pressure on the rope. He felt it give. The knot was tighter but he had a little more freedom. But not enough.

He heaved his body around until his face was against the nearest wall. He felt along with his nose and cheek. It wasn't a wall but a box. As he squirmed and rolled he discovered there was a lot of them.

Finally he came to the end. Something scratched his face. He felt it again. It was a metal band, circling the corner of a box. Hitching his body until his wrists were backed up against the metal, he began the tedious task of wearing away the strands of rope.

He worked methodically, but it took a long time. Finally, the last strand gave way. It was only a matter of minutes before he had freed his ankles.

The roll of the boat became heavier. Breck stood up and leaned against the pile of boxes. He felt sick at his stomach. He began exploring his pockets, and a surge of satisfaction came over him when his fingers closed over a package of matches.

With the welcome flare of the first one he took a hurried survey of his surroundings. He was in the hold of a ship and the hold was filled with boxes. The match went out and he lit another. He looked closer. The next instant his hand instinctively snuffed out the light. In large letters he had read the word: EXPLOSIVES.

Breck smiled grimly at his action. There was no chance of a match igniting anything in those boxes at that distance. He knew now why they had been piled high and were packed so closely. A loose one in a storm would raise considerable hell.

HE had noticed that the hatch was closed above him, but he wondered how well battened down it was. With painstaking care, he shifted several boxes until he estimated he could reach the hatch cover by standing on them. Then he climbed up. Groping until his hands found the end piece, he applied a slow pressure. The piece moved. Another few inches and he could see a bright mid-day sky.

Then he climbed up. There were other things he'd rather have been standing on than a pile of TNT, but he had no choice. Inch by inch he pushed the hatch open. Thrusting his head into the cool air he studied his surroundings. The first glance told him he was on a tuna clipper. The large fresh bait tank reared up behind the hatch.

There was no one in the stern, but a light showed from the cabin window on deck towards the bow and above him. The cabin above was a galley. The skipper's quarters, radio room and pilot house would be forward of that. The crew slept in the fo'c's'le.

Breck lifted himself on to the deck. They were heading out to sea. He felt for his gun, but wasn't surprised when he found it missing.

He thanked his luck that the aft was not occupied. Dropping back into the hold, he lifted three boxes through the hatch. Then he climbed back and crept along the deck to the companionway leading to the galley above.

Low voices came from the room, and he approached and looked through the window.

Two dark skinned Surasians sat across the long table from each other. One was large with high cheek bones and thick lips. The other was small with rounder eyes. He was well dressed.

"You are right, Tito," he was saying. He spoke with authority. "We must dispose of them quickly—especially the one in the hold. We have succeeded in the great undertaking; you will be rewarded."

"I seek no reward, Akoma. To serve you, the great leader of our intelligence service, is enough."

"So be it," said Akoma with greater dignity. "The Narka will take me off in a few hours. She is waiting fifty miles at sea. I have been in communication with her and explained everything. You will proceed with your cargo to meet the freighter that will take it across the sea. Do not make any effort to take further shipments of explosives until the furor of the theft of the plans calms down." He reached out a brown hand and folded up the papers on the table and placed them in an inner pocket with a sigh. "It has been a most difficult task to secure these, but the reward is worth it."

Breck backed away. So that was it! Here was the thief of the Navy's mine plans and specifications and here also was the answer to the TNT shipments Redfield had reported on. Here also was the manner in which the spies were getting in and out of the United States. It was one of those simple things that anyone should have thought of—but didn't.

Breck had known that many of the tuna clippers were operated by foreigners. Now he could see what an easy thing it was for them to contact foreign ships in Southern waters and trade crews, bringing back spies.

BRECK turned and went back down the companionway. As he reached the bottom, he heard some one coming. It was too late to get back to the hold. He pulled himself against the cabin.

As a yellow face came around the corner, Breck struck. His fist crashed to the point of the other's jaw. The man dropped, but as he fell his clutching fingers pulled an oil can over on him. It clattered noisily on to the deck.

Breck dashed for the stern. Grabbing one of the boxes, he carried it behind the bait tank. He rushed back and took the second. As he picked up the third he heard the beat of running feet on the deck above. Somewhere a voice shouted. It was echoed by another. Holding the box in front of him he looked up.

Akoma stood at the rail above, an automatic in his hand.

"All right," Breck spoke, "go ahead and shoot. But the minute you do, you'll be blown to hell where you belong!"

An instant baffled amazement swept across the dignified face of the little fellow. Then he smiled.

"You have won your point for the moment," he said. "You will find it very tiresome to hold that box for long, my friend."

The rest of the crew had joined him at the rail. Fear showed in their black eyes as the full portent of Breck's intention dawned upon them.

Akoma spoke to one of the men. He turned away. A strange stillness fell upon the group. Above the throbbing of the engines, Breck heard a voice.

"CR3 calling . . . . CR3 calling Steamship Narka . . . ."

What wisp of hope had grown for a moment in Breck's heart faded. He had forgotten that all tuna clippers carried radio transmitters as well as receivers.

He began to back around the bait tank to where he had left the other two boxes. Akoma and his companions watched him with curiosity. Keeping his eye on the man's gun, Breck placed his box on one of the others. Keeping these as a bulwark, he reached down and lifted the third box to the top of the other two. The narrow fortress came to his chin.

He looked up at Akoma. "Now," he challenged, "what are you going to do about it?"

Akoma brought back his smile. "It is for me to ask you, my friend. We have food and water."

"And," Breck flung back at him, "when a man doesn't eat or drink, he often does strange things, like throwing things around. I've got a few packages here that I'll toss your way first."

Akoma didn't answer. He spoke to Tito and handed him his gun and walked to the radio room beyond the galley.

Breck took stock of his position and found it woefully short of encouragement. There was grim satisfaction in the knowledge that he could prevent Akoma from delivering those plans. After all, what did it matter if he went out preventing him? Damn good G-men had lost their lives for a lesser cause.

Besides, then he wouldn't have to go back and tell Ruth about Larry.

THE hot sun beat down on his back and head. He wished that damned spy hadn't mentioned water. Now his mouth felt dry and parched.

Occasionally members of the crew would leave the rail, but they quickly returned. Breck seemed to hold a fascination for them.

Akoma joined the group and took the gun from Tito.

"We would consider a trade," he offered. "The dory with food and water, if you cared to leave. It isn't too far from the coast and the tide is right."

"If it was fifty yards, I'd still tell you to go to hell." Breck said calmly. But he felt a degree of relief. Akoma's offer had revealed his ignorance of Breck's identity. If they knew he was a G-man, they would never have offered him that chance.

Akoma shrugged.

The radio operator came out on deck and spoke hurried words.

Akoma turned his gaze out to sea.

Breck didn't have to be told what he was looking at. That would be the Narka appearing on the horizon. Akoma turned back and looked down at him. "The offer of the dory is still good," he said, "but I must soon retract it."

"And my answer still stands," said Breck.

Some of the dignity left the bearing of the little man. He half-raised his gun.

Breck lowered his head behind the box until only his eyes appeared over the top. What would happen when the other ship arrived? He could always hurl those boxes, but Akoma had undoubtedly informed the other ship of the situation on the tuna clipper. It would be better to start things now. But he had to make sure that there would be no slip. As soon as Akoma knew what he intended to do, they would cast all caution to the winds to get him first. At that close distance the odds were against him.

Breck was weighing this when his eye caught a movement beyond the group. At first he thought it was the helmsman, but the man he saw was crouching low.

The next instant all his training in emotional control came to his assistance. For the tattered figure creeping towards the group at the rail was Larry Travis! In one hand, he clutched a gun.

Breck watched him with fixed eyes. Larry moved unsteadily. His puffed face was twisted as though he was fighting to hold himself together.

The group was looking down at Breck. At any moment one of them might turn to look at the approaching steamer. If they did, Larry's chances would vanish.

To hold their attention, Breck shouted: "I'll make a deal!"

"Ah," Akoma sighed. "I am glad that you have at last seen the light of reason."

"I've always seen it," Breck retorted. "But how do I know you won't start pouring lead into me the minute I get into that dory?"

Larry had heard his voice and he seemed to stiffen. He was closer now and edging to the rail to command a view of every member of the group.

"You will have to take my word for it," said Akoma.

"If you mean what you say," Breck stalled, "shove that gun in your pocket. I'll come out."

A GLEAM of triumph lit the eyes of the little man. He shoved the gun into his coat pocket. Breck could read his thoughts. Akoma was ready to go for that weapon the minute he came away from those explosives.

Breck stepped in front of the boxes. The eyes of every man were on him. Larry straightened. He nodded to Breck.

Breck measured the distance to the companionway.

Then Larry shouted: "Move just one finger, you rats, and I'll start shooting!"

The five whirled as one man. The next instant they froze into gaping brown statues.

At Larry's command, Breck leaped. Scrambling up the companionway, he dove for Akoma, one hand clamping the little fellow's right wrist. With his other hand he yanked the gun from Akoma's

pocket. The next moment he was standing by Larry's side.

"Don't shoot, Larry," he warned. "We don't want to attract the one in the pilot house, or the engineer. We've got to hog-tie these."

"Make it snappy, Tom," Larry spoke in a thick voice. "I—I can't hold myself together much longer."

Breck grabbed a throw-line coiled beside the deckhouse. Shoving his gun into his pocket, he took out his knife and slashed the rope into short lengths.

He looked at Larry again. "Hang on a little while longer, boy," he said. "I'll have them trussed up in a jiffy."

Akoma still lay on the deck, half stunned by his fall. Breck deftly tied his wrists and ankles. Tito was next. Hatred flamed from the big fellow's eyes as Breck cinched the rope about his legs and arms. The others submitted stoically.

As he secured the last man, he spoke to Larry. "All right, son, take it easy."

Larry reached out and held himself erect with his hand on the rail.

"I didn't think I could make it, Tom," he said.

Breck didn't answer. He was already dragging his prisoners into the galley. As he half threw the last man in, he turned and pulled Larry behind the deck.

"We're not out of this hole yet," he said.

Larry brushed one hand across his inflamed eyes. "Tom, I'm glad to see you. I've been through hell."

"You look it," Breck replied.

"They've had me crazy—drugged—some damned stuff that makes you drunk as hell. I got away once—sort've remember cops getting me and me fighting them, then these skunks got me again. The first reason I've had was down there in that smelly bunk a little while ago. Your voice got through to me, pulled me out. I found a gun and started out to murder every damned one of them. Then I saw you. It didn't make sense—it doesn't yet."

Breck gripped his arm then stepped to the rail and looked across the bow. The distant hulk of a ship was silhouetted against the horizon. Black smoke plumed from twin funnels. She was under full steam. Breck turned to Larry.

"How do you feel now?"

Larry nodded. "Okay. Still a little foggy, but I'm coming out of it."

"Think you can go down and take care of that engineer?"

"Sure. What'll I do to him?"

"Make him keep those engines at full speed. I'm going into the pilot house. I'll signal you through the speaking tube."

Larry went down the companionway, and Breck slipped forward.

THE helmsman turned as Breck jabbed the gun into his ribs.

"Keep your mouth shut!" Breck barked. "Understand English?"

For a moment the other hesitated. His glance darted to the door. Then he nodded.

"All right, then. Swing her hard to starboard."

Slowly the clipper's prow came around. Breck watched the binnacle. When the compass read due east, he spoke.

"Hold her on that course! Don't try anything funny. The rest of your friends aren't going to help you. You'll get a dose of lead poisoning if you pull anything funny. Get me?"

Again the other nodded.

Breck glanced across the water to the Narka. Her smoke was blacker. She had guessed there was something wrong on the clipper.

The speaking tube whistled. Breck picked it up, said: "Larry?"

"Yep. I've got my gun in this baby's back. As far as I can understand these diesels, you're getting the limit."

"Fine," Breck answered. "See that we hold it. The Narka's smelled something. She's going to try and head us off. I'm afraid she can, too, but we'll give her a race."

"What if they decide to take a crack at us?"

"I'm not worried about that," Breck laughed grimly. "They know we're loaded with TNT and they know we've got their prize spy leader—no, they won't do any firing."

The sun was beginning to set in a great yellow blob. The Narka had changed her course and was bearing down swiftly across the clipper's bow. Breck watched her through narrowed eyes. Directly ahead, the Coronado Islands showed gray and cold on the sea. No harbor there. Breck swore. On several occasions he had fished the waters about those islands. If the clipper could hold her lead until she got there, they might be able to stave off the certain fate for a while.

Breck took up the speaking tube. "Any chance to squeeze a little more juice out of her?" he asked.

"I'll try. How're we doing?"

"Not enough. The Narka's too good for us."

"Hell," Larry snapped. "I'll try a little firmer persuasion on this mug."

Out of the corner of his eye, Breck saw the helmsman leap. He spun to meet the charge, but he was a second too late. The next moment he went down with talon-like fingers clutching at his throat. Breck felt the desperation in that vise-like grip. He drove his own fist into the man's face. With his other hand he tried to reach his gun. Then feeling his breath shutting off, he jerked one foot up and straightened his leg with his toe in the pit of the other's stomach. The helmsman's body crashed against the opposite wall of the pilot house. He came at Breck again, his dark face contorted. Breck's gun roared twice. With a horrible scream the man doubled up.

He stood over the figure for a moment. The man was dead. Breck leaped back to the wheel.

The speaking tube whistled. Breck grabbed it.

"This baby was lying," Larry called. "I persuaded him to get a few more revs out of these engines, but I'll have to watch him."

"Good work," Breck answered. "We'll need everything."

THE clipper surged under the increased power on her screws. Breck pulled her back on the course. Directly ahead, the Coronado Islands loomed. The Narka was bearing down from the starboard, her course set to cut off the clipper.

Breck's knuckles whitened as he held the wheel. If those skunks on that ship ever boarded the clipper, he shuddered to think what they'd do to Larry and him. Breck didn't care so much about himself—but Larry. He'd have to get Larry out of this. But how? Those islands offered nothing.

Suddenly his fingers went tighter on the wheel. There was a chance. A damn slim one, but he'd try it. His mouth was at the speaking tube.

"Larry! Can't you get a little more?"

"He says these engines will crack if he does," Larry answered.

"Let them crack, but get everything," Breck shouted.

The white curve of the wash rose higher on the nose of the clipper as she answered the drive of her engines, but the Narka was closing in. Breck could see the crew on deck now. Several were working with a gun on the forward deck.

Hell, they wouldn't shoot. Not with Akoma on board. Then came the puff of smoke. Something skipped and whined across the bow of the clipper.

Breck dashed out of the wheelhouse and back to the galley. There was a sneer on the thin features of Akoma.

"There is a saying in your America," he said between white teeth, "about a man who laughs last."

"Hell, you haven't got a laugh coming," Breck retorted. He stooped over the spy and thrust his hand into his inside pocket, drawing out the papers. He jammed them in his own pocket and rushed back to the wheel.

The two ships were only a half mile apart now. The Narka was taking no chances on cutting in too soon.

The short dusk of the tropics was settling over the water. Breck's eyes strained through that gloom, searching the water for the one hope—the hope that would give him a chance.

Again that puff of smoke and the whine of the shell. Breck laughed coldly.

Trying to bluff, eh? Then his eyes lit and a surge came into his heart. Directly ahead a patch of green showed on the water.

"Stand by for half speed," he yelled down to Larry.

"You ain't giving up, are you, Tom?"

"Giving up? Cripes, we're just starting to show these yellow rats something."

He glanced at the Narka. The water was churning at her stern. The crew was running along the deck.

Now the green patch was only a few hundred yards ahead. Breck spun the wheel. The clipper heaved over on her port side. The next minute she crossed in front of the Narka.

Larry was whistling at the tube.

"Hey, for cripes sakes, what's happened up there?" he yelled.

"A stay of execution," Breck retorted. "We're in the shallow water of the kelp beds . . . . seaweed to you. Half speed—no, cut the engines off. We can't run through this. Wish you could come up."

"I'll strap this chap up," Larry said.

Breck looked at the Narka. She was coasting to a halt. On deck were several officers with glasses. Well, they could get an eyeful. They'd never chance a run into this shallow water, but Breck was far from cheerful. The clipper was safe for the time being, but she was in a trap. Even as these thoughts came to him, he saw the Narka pick up speed and circle the kelp bed slowly.

Larry's head appeared at the doorway. "Now what do we do?"

"Damned if I know," Breck answered. "The Narka is going to take up a position between us and the coast. They know they can starve us out."

"Maybe we could wait until dark and then try the islands in the dory."

"Not a chance," said Breck. "No boat could land on those rocks with the surf pounding the way it does. No, it looks like we're in a tough spot."

DARKNESS was falling fast. The Narka was only a dark shape against the gloom. Her riding lights blinked on.

Breck looked for a switch and snapped on the clipper's forward light.

"Why do that?" Larry asked.

"I've got a hunch . . . . a crazy one, but we'll take the chance. Go below and stand by for orders."

"Okay, skipper," Larry said and disappeared.

Breck went out and down the stern companionway. There he examined an empty oil drum. Next he pulled a fire-axe from the wall. In a few moments he had made a hole in one end. Fastening a lantern to one end of a long boat hook, he stuck the other end in the barrel.

It was dark when he finished. Hoisting the barrel over the side, he lowered it into the water with a line. Then he hurried back to the pilot house and switched off all lights. Returning to the stern, he lit the lantern and cut the barrel loose. The lantern glowed fifteen feet above the water and swayed slowly in the rolling swell.

Rushing back to the wheel, he signaled the engine room.

"Larry, start up with slow speed ahead."

"What in—" But Larry's voice was cut off as Breck dropped the tube and turned to the wheel. He could scarcely hear the motors but he felt the deck vibrate.

Then the clipper crept forward. Breck looked over the stern at the Narka. Her riding lights were motionless. He glanced at the lantern. It fell off to the wake of the clipper.

In a few minutes, the best seaman would have taken it for a ship at anchor in the beds.

It was guess work for Breck now. He could make out the dim outline of the island off to the right. Once he put those between the clipper and the Narka he was safe.

The seconds dragged. Breck's eyes were on the lights of the other ship. Had they moved? He felt the pound of his heart in his throat.

He signaled for more speed. The engines throbbed faster. The black mass of rock passed to the stern. Breck worked the wheel. The point of the island loomed

nearer. Then the lights disappeared as the great rock came between the two ships. Breck heaved a sigh of relief. He signaled for full speed.

For another thirty minutes, he dared not hope. The island fell away into the night. Open water ahead. Another thirty minutes—it seemed an eternity. Then Breck heaved a sigh. He reached for the speaking tube.

"Jeese!" came Larry's voice. "I'm glad you called. What's happened? Where's the Narka?"

"We're heading for San Diego, Larry—ought to be there in a couple hours."

"But—but the Narka?"

Breck chuckled. "She's back there watching what she thinks is the riding light of the clipper. Somebody's going to have a red face tomorow morning."

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THE PAROLE PAWN

Gripping Novel

By JOHN K. BUTLER

FRAME FOR JUSTICE

Detective Novelet

By DON CAMERON

—Also—

A "Captain Murdock" Novelet

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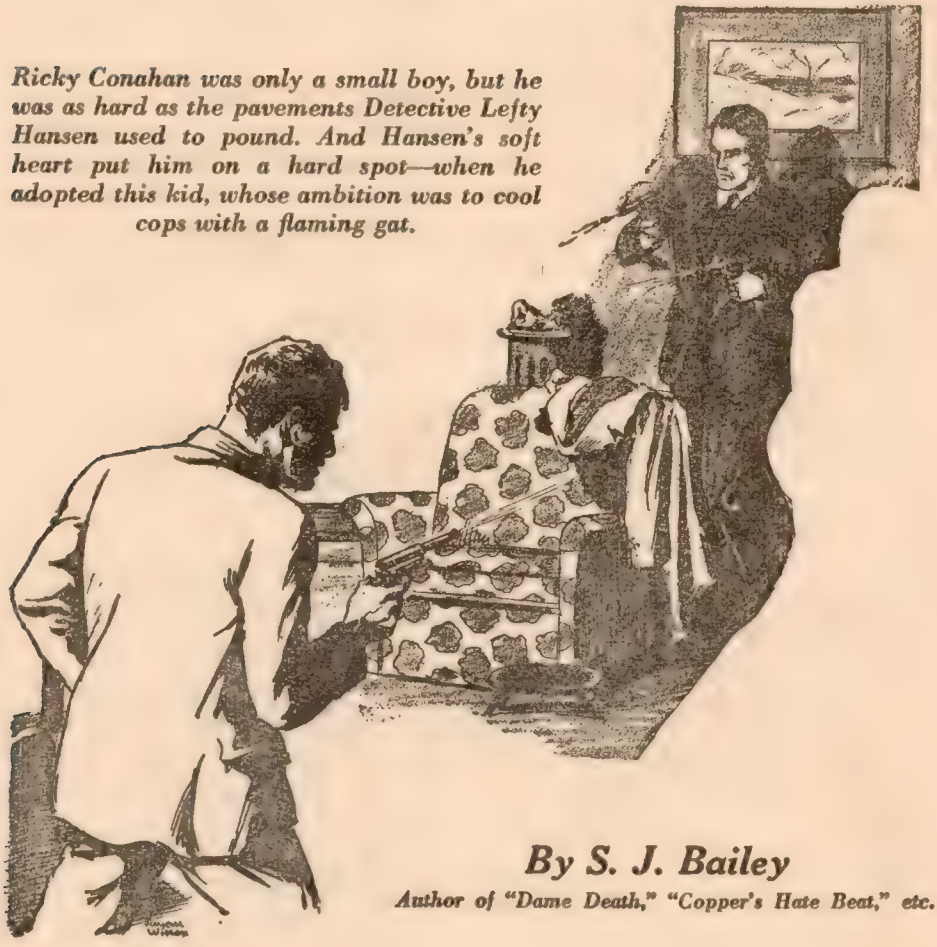
May TEN DETECTIVE ACES Out April 5th

Crime's Stepson

Ricky Conahan was only a small boy, but he was as hard as the pavements Detective Lefty Hansen used to pound. And Hansen's soft heart put him on a hard spot—when he adopted this kid, whose ambition was to cool cops with a flaming gat.



By S. J. Bailey

Author of "Dame Death," "Copper's Hate Beat," etc.

THE dark hallway reeked of garlic, decaying garbage and powder smoke. Its murky depths spat orange flame with lurid, deadly insistence. Its walls vibrated deafeningly with staccato explosions, between which the whimpering of frightened babies and rasping breathing of huddled tenants became audible.

Under the stairs, behind a couple of flimsy crates, crouched "Lefty" Hansen, city dick, his service Colt spitting flame, his blood-streaked jaw lined with dogged purpose. The crates were splintered and riddled as was the door panel through which hot lead spattered unceasingly at him.

Hansen reflected grimly that "Turk" Conahan, holed in and desperate, must have plenty of ammo—the way he was letting lead fly. Hansen was concentrating fire on the lock, because the stoolie who had tipped him off to the hideout had said that "Dinky" Peterson, Fargo Leeds' moll, was holed up in there with Turk Conahan. Lefty Hansen did not like the idea of shooting at women, even if they *were* on the wrong side of the law.

He cursed as a slug hit his knuckle, and he felt his trigger finger grow

moistly warm and sticky. Splinters from the fibrous wood of the case pecked at his cheek. He knew it was the wrong way to pull a raid, but he had tipped his hand in casing the joint; there hadn't been time to call a squad.

His right hand pumped steadily at the keyhole, keeping the fire low because he knew it was a crowded tenement section; and across the alley, behind the house, people were hanging out of windows, innocently waiting to be picked off by a stray slug. His left hand wiped away the blood that oozed into his eye from a scalp wound. Hansen was a dick who could think of the lives people led in holes like this; he knew that however rotten their lot might be, they nevertheless felt keenly for one of their family picked off by a stray slug.

Hansen had worked hard to run down this hideout. In a dark, evil-smelling joint on River Street, a flabby-mouthed dopester had whispered that Turk Conahan had split off from Fargo Leeds and lit out with Leeds' moll, Dinky Peterson. Hansen was under H. Q. orders to drop everything and get the Fargo Leeds outfit for the daring $600,000 daylight armored car robbery.

He saw the wavering crack of light appear alongside the door, and he knew the lock was weakened. He lost no time then. Disregarding the hail of slugs from within, he threw himself across the narrow hall. With a quivering thud his shoulder bit into the panel. The lock snapped, and the door staggered open. As it fanned back with explosive force, Hansen zigzagged across the threshold, his service Colt spouting fire.

TURK CONAHAN was ambushed behind a monstrous davenport, the heavy stuffing of which caught and held the cop's slugs, anchoring them harmlessly.

Sizing the situation instantly, Hansen charged to one side, his objective a vantage point from which he could fire directly behind the divan. Conahan saw the move, followed Hansen with a trail of slugs. One of them caught Hansen in the side. He staggered forward, brought up against the window, and clutched the sagging drapes for support.

The ancient curtain rod gave way, and the curtains fell like a capsizing tent on him. On his knees, his service Colt poked at the diaphanous material as he saw Turk Conahan, face livid with hate, drawing a cool bead for a death finish.

Hansen's next three slugs all entered approximately the same point of Conahan's body: his abdomen. It was a satisfying picture that Hansen looked down on a couple of moments later. Turk Conahan's body squirmed feebly. Blood leaked through his clothing at his stomach where his fingers pressed.

Red eruption bubbled through clenched teeth. He must have known he was passing out, yet he managed to leer up at Hansen, managed to force words from his mouth:

"You'll never—find it—you lousy copper. Got—it hid where—you'll never—look. S'long—heel—"

Hansen stared down at the dead gunman, a finely puzzled expression on his brow. What had he meant? Surely not the loot from the armor-car job. Leeds might let his man get away with his moll, but certainly not with the swag too.

Hansen turned away presently and examined the apartment. He did not find the moll, Dinky Peterson. Instead, he found a kid, a kid whose head barely reached to the thick part of his thigh. He was standing behind an overstuffed chair in another corner of the room, and he wore an old faded sweater, out at elbows, and an ancient cap, part of whose peak was broken and ripped away.

Lefty Hansen stared, pocketing his gun, leaning against the wall for support. The wound in his thigh was bleeding freely, saturating his clothing. A slow grin spread over his bloody face.

The kid did not appear afraid. He came out from behind the chair and stood looking down at the body of Turk Conahan. Little pools of blood were gathering on the floor from the gunman's wound. The kid stared at it as though the corpse were a big, new kind of fish behind glass at the Battery.

"Who—who are you?" asked Hansen, leaning over solicitously.

"Hell," said the kid, his voice coming from the corner of his mouth, "old man Turk ain't gonna beat the hell outta *me* any more."

Hansen stared. The kid was stony-faced, and his voice rasped harshly. Hansen had never seen such a tough face, not even on the most hardened of gutter rats. A crazy notion rocketed in his brain.

"Say, are you—" began Hansen, his hand grasping the kid's shoulder and spinning him around. "Are you—" He jerked his thumb at the corpse on the floor. "Was he your old man?"

The kid looked at him. His gaze was unblinking. "Sure," he said. Then: "What the hell of it?"

Hansen gulped, turned his face away. The kid was game all right; putting on a good act. A couple of minutes and he would break down, start to sob. Hansen felt pretty low. He knew that no matter how rotten Turk Conahan had been, to this kid he was probably a hero.

The kid's next words took the wind out of Hansen's middle. "Old man Turk was a sucker. He shoulda got you, copper. When I grow up, I'm gonna learn to work a rod and cool coppers."

His small lip twisted into a hard sneer. He stood his ground, and his face was stony.

Hansen shook his head, staring. He had never run across such a tough youngster. He sighed. The kid sure must have gone through the mill to be as tough as that.

"What's your name, kid?" asked Hansen.

"Ricky Conahan." The kid screwed up his face and stared coldly at Hansen. "You know, copper, you ain't in such a healthy spot. Old man Turk was Fargo Leeds' best rodman. For rubbing him out, I think you're gonna get a—you know what."

Hansen frowned. "No, I don't. What am I gonna get?"

"This guy Leeds is tougher even than old man Turk. When he wants to get rid of a copper, he puts him in a garbage can and ships him over to the docks. I think that's what you're gonna get pretty quick."

Hansen scratched his head. "Maybe you know a couple of answers, and maybe you don't. Suppose you give me the low-down on what happened to Dinky Peterson, the dame that Leeds and Conahan split over."

"Aw, they didn't split. That's a lot of frazzle-punk. Leeds and old man Turk were like a couple of pinkies doing a cake walk. So when I say they're gonna put your tail in a can, you can take it from me, copper, that I ain't handing you no baloney."

Hansen pressed Ricky further, but the kid did not seem to have any information on the armored-car job. Hansen wondered if the kid had the right dope on Leeds and Conahan, or if the tipster was right. It sounded as if the kid had the dope, all right, and if so, Hansen knew that he had a good chance now of tangling with Leeds pretty soon. Leeds was always quick to show his hand when cops' slugs drilled any of his men.

DURING the next few days, Lefty Hansen could not get the kid out of his mind. When the Arbuttle Street Ladies' Chapter of the Civic Betterment League dragged him in and forced him to accept a medal inscribed with words, *Bravery Under Fire in Defeating a Notorious Public Enemy*, his face burned right up to the roots of his hair.

He ducked away as fast as possible from the gushing, meddlesome women, and a deep sense of shame burning in him, hurried to his room in Mrs. Eagen's boarding house and hid the medal under a pair of shorts in his bureau drawer. The idea of getting a medal for killing Ricky's father burned into his mind like a flaming brand.

When Ricky's case came up before Judge Martin, Hansen slipped unobtrusively into Juvenile Court and dropped into one of the spectator's seats. The room was light and airy, with a relieving absence of the atmosphere of legal red tape. The judge sat at a long table, flanked by stenographers.

The probation officer brought in Ricky,

still dressed in the ragged sweater, and carrying his mutilated cap with its broken peak. He held it clutched tightly in clenched fist. His hands did not move nervously, twisting the cap. He just held it tight. His face was as rock-hard as ever, and he was apparently unaffected by the gravity of the proceedings.

Lefty Hansen quickly sized up the neat, comely woman seated a couple of chairs away, dressed in quietly expensive clothes. A puzzled expression wreathed his eyes as he noticed her restless movements, her lack of makeup with the exception of sparingly applied lipstick.

The judge cleared his throat and smiled at Ricky Conahan as he said: "Richard, I was over in your neighborhood last night, talking with some fellows belonging to the Apex Boys' Club. They have a pretty nice bunch over there, but they need a man for their soccer team. I was wondering—" The judge hesitated, pretending to look through the papers before him, while over the rim of his glasses he watched Ricky's face for signs of response. There was none. The boy stared straight ahead, stony-faced as ever.

"Next week," went on the judge, "the boys have a little party coming off. First they're going to have a swell feed, and then they're going to the movies and see the pictures of the Louis-Pastor fight. Do you think you'd like to see those pictures?"

Hansen shifted uncomfortably in his chair as he saw that Ricky made no response. It was as if he had not heard the judge's remarks. Hansen shook his head, muttered to himself and ground his teeth together. In another minute he was going to have to get up and go out of the room. "Hell," he thought, "what the kid must have been shoved through to get as hard as that!"

Finally Hansen could see that the judge was at his wits' end, and Hansen could not blame the judge. He was talking like a father and a pal all wrapped up together. He finally sighed and started to say that he wished Richard could take a different attitude. He would hate to send him to an institution. . . .

The woman sitting near Hansen suddenly jumped up and broke into the proceedings. As she spoke, her hand held a handkerchief to her eyes and her voice quavered: "Don't be hard on the boy, judge. I understand how things are with him. I'm a cousin of his father's. My name is Rita Conahan. I haven't seen the boy since his—father went the downward path. How's about letting me take the kid, judge, over to my joi—to my home. The little darling needs a mother's care, don't you see, judge?"

Hansen saw Ricky's lips curl at this. The judge looked surprised. He did not appear to notice the slip in the woman's speech. He looked at the probation officer, said: "Evidently you have not made a complete investigation. Your report states that there were no other relatives."

"Judge," said the probation officer, looking puzzled, slightly suspicious, "we made an unusually thorough search. As far as the records go, and as far as any one in the neighborhood knows, there were no other relatives."

"You see I'm from Milwaukee," broke in the woman. "When I heard about Turk Conahan getting himself shot—"

HANSEN leaped to his feet at that point, and said: "Your Honor, I'm Detective Hansen, East Side Squad, assigned to the Leeds case. I'd like to say something."

"Go ahead," said the judge.

"This dame," said Hansen, "is a fake. She isn't any relative of this kid."

The woman whirled, faced Hansen. Her face suddenly twisted with rage, her mouth working.

Hansen continued before she could say anything. "She's Dinky Peterson," explained Hansen, "she's the kinker that's been peeling Leeds' potatoes for the last couple of years. I don't know what kind of oats she's peddling here, but—"

The woman let out a screech. "Why can't you keep your lousy tonsils iced, you flat-footed punk? It's lame-brains like you that keep a girl from going respectable."

"You see, judge," put in Hansen, "she's dressed like a lady, and she's hard to

recognize that way. She's never been mugged without makeup and—"

Dinky Peterson dragged her fur piece tighter around her neck. She tossed her head, shrugging her shoulders. "Why should I get a crack in my lip over you, you bum shamus. What the hell? I feel nude anyway without any war paint."

Judge Martin signalled a court officer, quietly directed her arrest. He nodded approvingly at Hansen. "Good work, Hansen," he said.

The officer took a firm grip on Dinky Peterson's arm. She blasted a hot mouthful of expletives at him, then laced into Hansen: "In a couple of hours, Fargo's mouthpiece will spring me, and then where will you be, you fathead?"

Hansen shook his head, grinning bleakly. "What's more likely to happen is that I slap the rest of that lousy outfit into the can with you. Don't worry, you won't be lonesome."

"Don't hand me that malochi." She laughed, started toward the door, dragged by the officer. "The hot finger is on you, Hansen. Leeds told me he's got the can all picked out for your tail. He's gonna plant you in the middle of the harbor, about a quarter of a mile from the Statue of Liberty. Ain't *that* a laugh?"

When the judge turned back to Ricky, Hansen spoke up: "Your Honor, I heard what you said. I mean, I—well, about the—what was that, a reform school you were talking about?"

The judge nodded slowly. His eyes centered on Hansen, and there was a queer light in them.

Hansen stumbled on, words coming haltingly from his inexperienced lips. "Judge, I was just thinking, maybe you'll agree, I don't know, but I was just thinking that—well, a young kid like this—" He did not look at Ricky, although he was standing about four feet away. "A kid like this is sometimes liable to copy what his elders are doing. I mean, you know how it is; a kid sees somebody doing something and he thinks it's great. He doesn't know if it's wrong. Well, anyway, I was thinking that if this reform school you're talking about— Some of the older boys are—well, they're bad, too, ain't they? Now, if he goes there, he's liable to think they're great guys, because they're a couple of years older, and do some of the things they do. Well, you get my idea, don't you?"

Judge Martin smiled. His voice was dry. "What you're getting at, Hansen, is that we ought to place him in *your* custody. The theory is that he'll get along all right if he has *you* to watch and to ape. Is that it?" Somewhere in the back of his eye hovered a twinkle.

Hansen got fiery red. He spoke up heatedly. "Judge, I didn't come here to ask you for the boy. Well, I didn't think I did. Maybe I did, and didn't know it. Anyway, it's a good suggestion, judge. How's about giving me the boy? Mrs. Eagen, my landlady, will be glad to help me straighten him out."

Judge Martin looked grave. "From what I've already learned of this case and its ramifications, it is not yet concluded. You still face a big job. The rest of this Leeds mob is at large, and if we are to be guided by our unpainted friend who just left, they are getting ready to put, as they term it, the finger on you. No, I don't think it is such a good idea."

Hansen's jaw dropped at the note of finality in the judge's voice. For the first time he looked swiftly down at the kid, hesitated, opened his mouth as if to say something, then stopped and turned away.

Judge Martin was frowning, looking from Ricky Conahan to Hansen. He noticed that for the first time, the boy appeared to be showing interest in something. The way Hansen was standing, with his hand in his trouser pocket, his coat was shoved back; and the badge, pinned high up on his vest, was partly showing. Ricky was doing monkey antics with his neck in order to see the shiny thing better.

Suddenly, Judge Martin cleared his throat, then said: "I shouldn't be doing this, but I'm going to take a chance. But only—" he eyed Hansen sharply— "because you seem to have a good head as well as a right heart. One of the reports I have before me is signed by a psychiatrist who interviewed the boy. He seems to have arrived at the same conclusion

as you regarding the danger of his aping his elders in an institution." He stopped, cleared his throat again, then addressed Ricky: "Richard, how would you like to go and live with Detective Hansen?"

Ricky looked up at the judge, then said: "Sure, I guess so." There was just a hint of a swagger in his voice, as if he were well aware that a lot of people were having a hectic time over the problem he had been able to boil up for them.

Outside, Hansen saw the two men leaning against the railing, their heads close together, apparently engrossed in private conversation. Hansen lost no time. He shoved the kid into a cab and said: "Step on it, driver. This is police business."

THE kid saw the driver's respectful salute, his hurried movement with the car controls. The cab leaped into traffic. For a split second, the kid's face relaxed, then it hardened again.

Hansen, watching from the rear window, saw the two men hurry into a waiting sedan and take off in pursuit. His brow clouded. He wondered why Dinky Peterson had taken such a chance to get the kid. And now it looked as if members of Leeds' gang had been trailing her, and were acting under similar orders. Hansen's face wore a hard, puzzled look.

The pursuing machine was much faster than the cab, which was hampered by traffic. Hansen saw the gap closing, and he dragged out his service Colt, at the same time shoving the kid roughly to the floor of the cab.

The cab crashed a red light, its horn screaming. The sedan barged through in its wake, almost running down a traffic cop. The sedan blew up alongside, and Hansen saw the drawn shades, the ugly snout of a sub-machine gun poking through a window opening. Then the rattle of high-speed slugs shattered the peaceful atmosphere.

A wavering line of jagged holes weaved its way across the metal hull of the cab, wrote itself a crazy diagram in the window glass, then zigzagged down again. Hansen, crouching protectively over the kid's body, snapped a shot at a hand that showed on the stock of the sub-machine gun. He saw a finger fly and blood spatter the glass of the sedan. He could not see the faces of the men inside.

The two cars were rolling at top speed, neck and neck. Hansen steadied himself to fire into the depths of the sedan. He felt the cab lurch suddenly under him, shot a quick glance toward the driver and saw that he was slumped over the wheel. The machine-gun slug had drilled him.

The cab careened into a fire plug, snapped it off, brought up against an iron railing, a couple of feet from a baby carriage full of squawking kids. The sedan gathered speed and roared away down the street.

With unsteady hand, Hansen picked up the kid and examined him. Not a whimper came from his hard little mouth. The detective shook his head, swallowing hard. If the kid had shrieked with pain from a slug in his stomach, Hansen would not have felt as bad as he did then. It seemed as if the kid were all dried up inside, had no feelings at all.

"I told you those guys were measuring a can to fit your tail," said the kid. "I guess maybe you need some practice with your rod."

Hansen's voice was slightly hoarse. "Yeah, I guess you're right, kid."

Mrs. Eagen came to the door of the boarding house, wiping her reddened, soapy hands on a faded gingham apron. She took one look at the kid and melted to him. She said: "Hello, sonny, I'm glad Lefty brought you home. It gets kind of lonesome at times. Let me have your hat."

The kid pulled back, his lips curling. "Jeez, how I hate blubber-pusses tangling with me. Lemme alone, can't you?"

Mrs. Eagen looked very pained, took occasion to speak privately with Hansen at the first moment. "Ye've gone daft I think, Lefty. The lad's as hard as the pavements you used to pound."

Hansen looked worried, yet his jaw remained ridged with dogged purpose. He gritted: "I never seen a kid yet that didn't have a soft spot. I'm gonna find his or turn in my badge."

Mrs. Eagen knew how much Lefty thought of his badge, and she didn't question him further.

When he got back home later in the day, he found Mrs. Eagen in tears and his room almost literally torn apart. His clothing and personal effects were scattered all about. Mrs. Eagen explained that the kid had looted the place and run away.

Lefty Hansen, his heart feeling like an icy lump of lead, checked the room carefully. There was a lot of incidental damage, and everything was in a mess. But he was unable to find a single item missing. Suddenly he thought of the medal he had received from the Civic Betterment League. He looked in the drawer under the shorts and could not find it. He was sure he had placed it there. It was very queer. The medal was the only thing missing.

Ricky had taken the medal that Hansen received for killing the kid's old man. It probably didn't mean anything, but it made Hansen tramp up and down the room, kicking at clothing and books, his eyes blind to everything but the blurred picture of bleak walls.

He reported to H. Q., and Lieutenant Bannigan barked impatiently at his request. "What the hell d'you think we're running, Hansen," he said, "a day nursery? Report the kid to the probation officer and get back on the Leeds armor-car job. Forget the brat. You ain't his old man—or *are* you?"

The lame joke didn't get across to Hansen. He looked bewildered. "I've got to find the kid, lieutenant," he said. "I don't know what may happen to him. You see, the Leeds mob are trying to get him for some reason."

Bannigan started. "The hell you say! Wait a minute, now, maybe that brat will lead you to the hideout?"

Hansen shook his head. "No, I don't think he knows anything about that angle."

Lieutenant Bannigan pulled the handsome fountain pen out of his desk set and pointed it viciously at Hansen. "Now, get this," he said. "You're on the Leeds case. It looks as if it ties in with the kid. Remember, you're on that case; that is, officially. Of course, there's nothing to stop you from keeping an eye out for the kid, especially as it may tie in with—"

Hansen gulped, said: "Okay, lieutenant." He turned to leave. Behind his back Lieutenant Bannigan sighed audibly. There was something about the way Hansen acted over that kid that had kind of got the boys on the force. If it had been his own kid, they could have understood it. But the prospect of the hard-boiled dick trying to pierce the tough armor of the little gutter rat made plenty of locker room comment.

THE cab was waiting for Hansen outside headquarters, and he stepped on the running board, his mind seething with the possibility that the kid might have gone to the Leeds-mob hideout. He realized if that was the case, only one thing could happen: Leeds would figure the kid had left a trail and would bump him and powder. And even if he didn't leap to that conclusion, he'd be bound to get the kid out of the way so he wouldn't tag the mob. After all, the kid had been in the papers.

It wasn't until the muzzle of the gun shoved hard into Hansen's middle, that he realized he had walked into a trap. The man behind the gun had been crouching in the corner of the cab, whose interior was dark because of the small, oval windows. Hansen blinked, staring at him. The man had low, black side-boards and a wide, split mouth.

"Act natural," ordered the low, rasping voice. "Crawl in here and act like you was going places. Otherwise, I got orders to give you the slug now and leave you in the gutter."

Hansen slowly obeyed, sinking into the leather cushion beside the gunman. He noticed that his regular driver had disappeared, his place having been taken by a bull-necked bruiser with cauliflower ears and a permanently flattened nose. The cab leaped to life, its motor roaring.

As the hurrying machine slithered through the busy city streets, Hansen sized up his captors. He said: "Well, has Fargo got that can measured to fit my tail yet?" He spoke lightly, while a certain fear tugged at his stomach.

The gunman stared, jabbing the rod

hard against Hansen's side. "Fargo tipped me off you were a wise cracker. He said that's why he's gonna dump you right close to the Statue of Liberty. He said he thinks you probably want to make a speech to the fish in the harbor. But you won't be lonesome. The damn' brat is gonna be in a can too."

Hansen strove to mask his feelings. His worst fears were confirmed. The kid was in the hands of the mob.

The cab took a corner on screeching, scorching rubber, and Hansen was thrown violently against the gunman. The man looked surprised. "You know, you damn' near got it that time. I don't know why the trigger didn't go off. When the cab threw around like that, my finger touched—"

"Why worry about that?" asked Hansen with simulated lightness. "You're gonna bump me anyway."

"Fargo would be sore as hell if I bumped you now. He wants to do that himself."

The cab entered a warehouse district, tooled along for about ten blocks, then turned into an alley between two brick buildings. With practiced movement, the bull-necked man guided the car to the rear of the building and into an open doorway. A sign above the doorway said: *K and L Moving Van Company. Unclaimed Goods Department.*

As soon as Hansen's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he recognized the large object which loomed up in the corner. It was a huge moving van. The gun prodded him from the car, and his captor said: "Come on, copper, get the lead out of your pants and get over there."

A couple of minutes later, Hansen found himself inside the moving van and realized that he was in the mob's hideout. An oil lamp hung from the ceiling, and the sides of the van were lined with cots. His heart sank as he saw the motionless form of Ricky Conahan lying on one of the cots. He couldn't tell if the kid was sleeping or out for keeps.

Fargo Leeds came forward, faced Hansen. He laughed brutally as he saw Hansen look toward the boy. He was a big man with heavy, protruding cheek bones. He had a habit of throwing his head back and looking down at people with black, piercing eyes.

"So, copper," he said, "you thought you'd queer my girl?" His expression did not change. His head stayed back, his eyes narrowed and black pupils gazed at Hansen. His hand came up and crashed into the side of Hansen's jaw. Hansen stood his ground, his two captors holding him, one at each arm.

"Look, Fargo," said Hansen, "I'm not roosting bats in my belfry. I got a pretty good idea why you dragged me here. You're not ready to bump me. You need me."

Fargo Leeds suddenly snarled. "So, you think you have me in the rail position in this setup?"

Hansen shrugged carelessly. "Turk Conahan split off from you, but it wasn't on account of the moll. When I knew that, I asked myself what it could be. Well, there's only one answer. It must be the six hundred grand you copped from that armored car."

The look of rage on Leeds' blackened face was enough answer.

"No sooner do I leave the kid alone," went on Hansen, "than he rummages around and finds himself a badge and goes out to round up the gang. He couldn't find a regular badge, so he pinned that medal on, the medal I got for knocking off his old man. The first track out of the bag, he runs into you; and you pick him up. You thought he was the answer to your problem. The only way I can figure it is that Turk Conahan ran out with the six hundred G's and got himself shot up. The kid maybe knows something about the dough, so you go after him. You even send Dinky Peterson in a wild attempt to get him. But when you get the kid, he hasn't got what you think he has; so you figure he might have transferred it to me. Not so dumb, eh?"

Fargo Leeds snarled. "You know something, you damn' smart shamus. We're gonna find out what it is. Right now you're saying things you want to say; but in a couple of minutes you'll be spilling all you ever knew, you damn'—"

HANSEN was shaking his head, grinning. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the boy stir, sit up, rub his eyes and stare. Hansen's heart leaped. He said: "The only thing is, supposing I *did* get the cue to the cash from the kid; where d'you suppose it would be now? You don't suppose I'd risk getting myself cashiered from the Force by holding out on H. Q.?"

As he spoke, his glance, becoming more accustomed to the gloom, took in the rest of the cots and the interior of the van. Near the rear tail-board, which could be closed up quickly at any sign of alarm, he saw the twin cylinders of an acetylene blow-torch outfit. He nodded. "So you had to cut open the truck with a torch, eh?"

Fargo Leeds' fist flew, this time landing squarely on the point of Hansen's jaw. He staggered back, shaking his head, holding his hand to his face. "Hell," he said, "you don't have to prove that I can take it; you know."

The kid was slowly advancing from the cot, his eyes alight with a strange expression as he watched Hansen. It was as if he were witnessing some strange animal doing a somersault at the zoo. From old man Turk he could never have gained any notion other than that gunmen were tough he-men, and that cops were sneaks. Gunmen could take it, while cops were lily-livered softies. But this strange animal, Lefty Hansen, could go soft in one moment over a kid that had been kicked around, then go hard as nails the next, taking punishment that would have made the toughest gutter rat yell and cringe.

Jeez, if cops were guys like that, and besides didn't have to hide in rain barrels and stinking crates, and besides could wear badges and uniforms—maybe there *was* something in it. Anyway, nobody could blame you if you felt you'd like to have a guy like Hansen tell you you were all right.

"Light up the torch," directed Leeds. He spoke to the bull-necked man, who turned to obey without question.

Hansen saw that the kid was fitting his broken-peaked cap down over his head with deliberate movement. Somehow, his face had changed. It still had a hard look, but it was a kind of hardness that was tempered with a suggestion of useful purpose.

"Get back, Turkie," growled Fargo Leeds at the boy, and the kid backed away.

The bull-necked man had the acetylene torch going now. Its blue cone of flame flared and sizzled with intense heat. He approached Hansen whose right arm was being held in an iron grip by the gunman who had first captured him.

"Which part of the lug d'you want me to burn first, chief?" asked the bull-necked man.

"Burn his damn' shoes off, Bellach," directed Leeds.

The man called Bellach let the blue cone of flame swoop downward, toward the toes of Hansen's shoes.

The kid let out a yell as he ducked between Fargo Leeds and the wall of the van. A protruding nail caught the ragged sweater, and it almost threw the kid on his face. He drove himself forward, ignoring the ripping garment, and thrust the gun at Hansen's left hand. It was apparently Fargo Leeds' weapon. He must have left it on a cot in the far corner of the van.

The blue flame from the torch flared out and licked hungrily at Hansen's feet. His hand grabbed the gun from the kid, and instead of attempting to fire, he swung it in a vicious arc, landing a crushing blow against the jaw of the man who held him. He felt him grow suddenly limp. The force of the impact knocked the gun, insecurely held, from his hand. Hansen leaped back just as Bellach, a surprised look on his face, was pulling the torch back. The man who had been holding Hansen folded up, his face falling against the flaming nozzle of the acetylene torch. Flesh sizzled and a nauseating stench of burning skin and bone filled the confined atmosphere of the van.

Leeds yelled an oath, and Bellach dropped the torch, springing back toward Hansen, who was making for the rear of the van. Bellach caught up with him just as he was at the tail-board. Bellach's powerful arms closed around him. Han-

sen threw out his hand, grabbed one of the heavy cylinders, the one containing the oxygen. He used it as an anchor, attempting to spin himself loose from Bellach's hold at his throat.

Bellach slipped, went over the tail-board. The weight on the cylinder toppled it, and it crashed to the tail-board, breaking the chains as if they were so many pieces of grocery twine, then plunged to the floor, crushing Bellach's chest. He lay still.

Meanwhile Fargo Leeds had slammed the kid against the side of the van, grabbed up the other gunman's rod, and charged toward the rear. The kid bounced right back from the side of the vehicle and attempted to entangle himself in Leeds' plunging legs. Leeds wasted no time. He fired at the boy, and the kid went down in a heap.

HANSEN had seen Leeds shoot at the boy. He let out a bellow and heaved himself headlong at Leeds, in the face of the rod which threw hot lead. Hansen closed in, rendering the gun useless as a firearm, while his two fists battered at Leeds' face like a pair of hundred-pound trip hammers. Deliberately, silently, grimly he fought.

Leeds gave way, inch by inch. By the time he had backed to the cot, Hansen had battered his face to a bleeding mass of pulp. A cheek bone showed through, raw and naked. Blood oozed from numerous cuts. Hansen suddenly stopped battering Leeds. Leeds' arms had become powerless. His eyes were almost puffed shut. He took one last glimmer of a glance at Hansen, swayed a moment, then fell to the floor in an inert bundle.

Panting, his throat rasping for breath, Hansen dragged his feet back to where the body of Ricky lay in a huddled, twisted heap. Savagely he caught up the frail form and held it against his chest. Suddenly he started, as he felt the limbs moving. He held the boy away and looked at him. He saw his eyes flutter.

He saw that Leeds' bullet had hit the medal which the kid was wearing under his sweater. His chest was bleeding from only a superficial wound.

Hansen's eyes felt hot and sticky. He was sure he had a scalp wound that was bleeding freely. But when he wiped his forehead, his handkerchief came away without showing red. He shook his head hastily. His tongue had a salty taste. He managed to say: "That was a smart thing, Ricky, shoving that gun at my left hand, instead of my right. How did you know?"

"Gee," said Ricky, "they *call* you Lefty, don't they? And you were shooting at those lugs in the car with your left hand. Gosh, will you show me how to shoot with my left hand?"

Hansen swallowed hard, gripped the old, broken-peaked cap from the kid's head, ripped apart what was left of the peak, and heard a metallic click as something fell to the floor. He picked it up. It was a key on which was stamped a number, together with the name of a station on the Eighth Avenue subway line.

"You see," said Hansen, "that's how a good dick works it out. I figured they searched you everywhere, and I tried to think of a place they might not look.

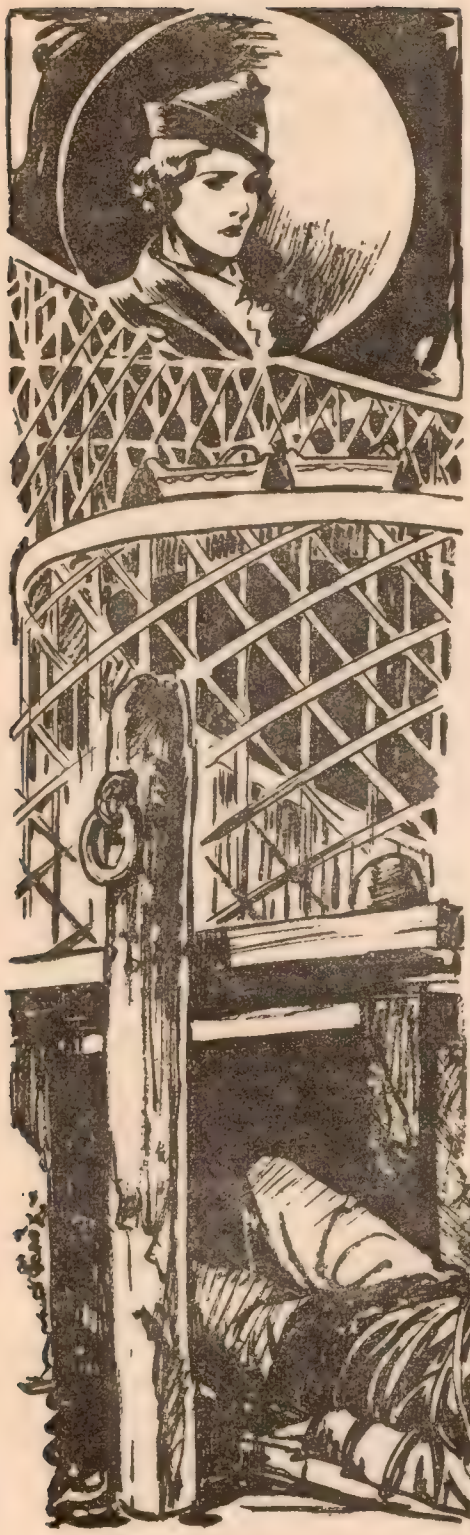
"I was pretty sure you were the key to the loot, the way they were after you. And Turk Conahan, with his dying words, told me I'd never think of looking for the stuff where he had it hid. I figured it'd be some place like this, something we were looking at all the time and never tumbled to."

"Gee," said the kid. "What's the key for?"

"It's the key to the locker where they cached the six hundred grand, most likely," explained Hansen. "Turk Conahan forced it down between the cardboard of the peak, probably while you were asleep. He was determined nobody'd get the stuff if anything happened to him."

"Boy," said the kid, "I'm gonna be a cop when I grow up—and shoot lousy heels like Leeds. Cops are okay."

Gravely, Hansen pulled the medal off, threw it away and pinned his own badge on the kid. Then he rumpled the kid's hair, grinning. "You'll make a damn good cop," he said.



Murder Maiden

Mystery Novelet

By Steve Fisher

Author of "Emperor Blackmail," etc.

Hundreds saw and heard Kay Raymond blast slugs at the dance-hall owner. And Detective Bill Duke had to prove that they were all stark mad —or lose the girl he loved to the arms of the electric chair.

KAY RAYMOND did not know why, but from the first, the publicity job Jack Sanders was hiring her to do, gave her a bad taste. As she listened to him outline it in detail, this feeling grew until a cold chill crept up her spine. She would have told him to get some one else for the job, except that she needed the ten dollars so desperately!

She spoke into the wall phone in her room: "Thanks, Jack. I mean, thanks awfully. . . . Yes, it's tough about the show folding in a town like this—nothing but sailors around. . . . Money? Listen, Jack, I'm down to my last sou, and be-

lieve you me, that ten dollars will help out. I appreciate it. . . . All right, I'll see you there at the Silver Spray."

She hung up, and for a moment the thought of making ten dollars exhilarated her. But she looked out the window, down six stories to the drab street, and the elation died. Restlessly, she tapped a cigarette on the sill and lit it.

Long Beach: the little busses moving up and down the crowded avenue, the trolleys, the mobs of people; and far down Cherry Street, beyond it and out in the harbor, she could see the outlines of the battleships and cruisers and aircraft carriers that lay at anchor. The sun had gone down, and light was fast vanishing, so that even as she watched, the vision turned from shape and size to pin pricks of light so distant that it was difficult to make them out.

She turned from the window and, going to a closet, got her white satin formal and silver pumps and laid them out.

She felt blue and went to the mirror. She must not let hysteria and fright, cynicism and bitterness, induced by her temporary unfortunate circumstances, discourage her from reaching the goal for which she dreamed—that of a movie star. Nor must she allow the queer feeling of horror that had come to her with Jack Sanders' voice overwhelm her sense of reason. Ten dollars was ten dollars.

She looked at herself in the glass, at the soft red hair that accentuated the pale white of her skin, the vivacious jade-like green of her eyes, and the flare of crimson that was her mouth. But she had more than beauty; she had personality that was like a flame; and an ability to dance. That was how she happened to be down here thirty miles from Hollywood in a leg show. Broke, weary of waiting for a call from Central Casting, the job had been heaven-sent. Now it was over. The show had collapsed over night.

Suddenly she thought again of that strange feeling of terror which possessed her. "I must not," she said aloud. "I must put it from my mind!"

She thought: Jerry Freeman might be at the Silver Spray Ballroom tonight. Jerry, who was the only man in whom she had been even vaguely interested for two years. But she liked him too little to want to learn to love him, and too much to want to lose his friendship. He was a chief petty officer on one of the battleships in the harbor, and Jack Sanders, who had been publicity agent for the disbanded show, had introduced her.

She got up and slipped into the formal gown. Might as well get there early. . . .

THE pike was mobbed. A laughing crowd—girls hanging on the sailors' arms; the clatter of concession girls; the roar of the scenic railway; the hoarse voiced little men with their prizes of ham and Indian blankets; the dock girls, destined to an endlessness of an eternal road.

At this time of the year the pike was the home of these women, the Silver Spray ballroom their palace of fun. That was why Kay Raymond did not particularly like the job she had down there tonight. She had been to the place only once before, and that had been with Jerry Freeman.

She arrived now to find Jack Sanders out in front. The gray-haired publicity agent, his face seamed with lines, his small black eyes bright, was, as usual, slightly under the influence of bad gin.

"Glad you got here, Kay," he said. "Here's the gun."

She took the .38 he handed her, broke open the chamber and dumped out the blank cartridges. "Okay," she whispered.

Jack Sanders' little eyes gleamed not unlike a monkey's. He dug into his pocket and brought out a wrinkled ten dollar bill and pressed it into her hand. "Guess I can trust you," he said. "Get the gun out of the way now—and don't worry. The theatrical license I have as publicity agent will cover our little stunt tonight. Old man Wall knows what's going to happen and he'll react naturally."

She nodded: "Have you seen Jerry?"

"Yeah, he's inside."

She went into the ballroom. It was packed. Sailors and girls were everywhere. Water swished up underneath the place, rocking through the pilings. The orchestra swung from one number to the

next, fox trot to waltz, seemingly without ever getting tired.

She found Jerry after a while. He was garbed in uniform. His hair was sleek and black, combed down like patent leather. His skin was tight, so that his face seemed to shine as though it had been scrubbed too much. He had warm brown eyes, and an aquiline nose.

"Well, Kay," he said, "here you are!"

"Hello, Jerry."

They danced for some time. Jerry kept talking, but Kay scarcely heard what he said, for suddenly something had gripped her so that she was frightened. Premonition, perhaps. She tried to laugh it off. But try as she did, the tenseness increased until her throat was tight, and she thought she was becoming sick. She told Jerry she wanted to sit down, and they went out on the balcony and looked at the ocean, at the glimmering porthole lights of the ships. Kay watched the water, listened to the soft, silken swish. At last she turned to him.

"I am probably a little fool," she said, "but, Jerry, I have the strangest feeling. It's as though I were going to commit murder."

"Nonsense!" he laughed.

She laughed too, but it was not healthy laughter. Jerry guided her back into the ballroom. The floor was being cleared, and light shone down on its glistening surface. Kay saw Jack Sanders standing just below the orchestra stand. Nervously she unlatched her purse.

"Helluva good publicity stunt," he had said. "Of course they'll know a moment later it's a fake, but it's a good enough trick to get comments from the papers, and it'll jack up trade."

Now the fat, round-faced owner of the Silver Spray was waddling out into the center of the floor. Boos and cheers sounded from the good-natured crowd. Funny, Kay thought, he looked perfectly natural, not at all as though he expected to be the center of a publicity stunt. He did not seem afraid, nor was there amusement in his eyes. The fat dance-hall owner held up his hand, blinked into the lights.

Kay was trembling now. Jack Sanders gave her the signal. She pulled the gun from her purse.

Four shots screamed from it.

Wall spun about, crashed to the floor with a sickening thud. For a moment there was ghastly silence. The crowd surged forward then, and women screamed. Kay Raymond was carried with the mob. Her eyes wide, she looked at the floor. Then, catching her breath, she felt her senses reel, and she stifled a scream. Numb with horror, she looked again.

Half of the fat man's head had been shot away. *Real blood* was oozing across the floor.

It was murder!

IT had been common gossip for days around the Long Beach police headquarters that that hard-hitting, case-cracking guy from the homicide squad was getting soft. They meant young Bill Duke of course. He had a hard look in his eyes, and he didn't think murder was fun any more.

Bill Duke was not too big—inches under six feet; but he was all muscle, a lot of it in his shoulders. He had light hair, and gray eyes, a leathery skin. Everybody liked him, and he wasn't fond of that, because it was inconvenient sometimes—touches for a few dollars; standing somebody else's duty.

But lately something had come over him and nobody knew what it was. At least if they knew, they weren't saying.

Duke knew, though. He was, at this moment, all too conscious of it. His cheeks stung, and he was aware that they were flushed red. He could feel the blood tingling in them. It was as though he had been slapped and slapped hard.

He stared down, as he had for the past several minutes, at the fat man on the dance floor; at what was left of the ballroom owner's head. At last he looked up and eyed a sailor who stood between two radio cops.

"This girl who shot him—what did you say her name was?"

"Kay Raymond."

Duke nodded. "I see." He fumbled with a cigarette, put it in his mouth and lit it. "Not the girl who was in that musical comedy down here, of course. Not—"

He turned a letter over in his hand. It was addressed to Wall, the victim, and was written in ink. The name scrawled at the bottom was Kay Raymond. It was pretty affectionate, and at the same time desperate: to the effect that his love for her was cooling. Duke hated to admit it, but it was almost a written confession. At least, perfect motive.

"Yeah," said the sailor, "she's the one. Jerry Freeman was going with her. He told me all about her."

"Who is Freeman?"

"He used to be a chief petty officer in the navy. He was discharged last week."

"Was he here tonight?"

"Sure," said the sailor, "but I don't know where he is now."

Duke puffed on the cigarette, his cheeks getting redder and redder. Kay Raymond. Good lord! For two weeks solid at almost every performance when he could get off, he had sat in the second row and watched her. She had had a small part, specialty tap dancing, and did one song. Duke had kept coming back because it seemed to him that there had never been a girl in the world before that was quite like her. It was an unexplainable something in her personality which drew him the third and fourth times out of curiosity.

It was about then that he had began sending gladiolas. After the first week he changed to roses and realized—damn fool that he thought himself—that he was actually infatuated with her. And maybe worse. He had waited at the stage door the last four days prior to the show's closing, and only once had she stopped, and that was just a minute to thank him for the flowers. Stage door Johnny—gosh, he'd been embarrassed! If anyone had told him he would ever do a thing like that he would have laughed in scorn.

He went on doggedly with the questions: "She—she disappeared right after the shooting?"

"Yes, that's right."

Duke stepped on the cigarette and ground it out with his heel. He cocked his right eyebrow. "What's *your* name and how come you know so much about it?"

The sailor, a thin, bony man whose blue uniform hung baggily on him, and whose eyes were spots of jet black, said: "James Noel is my name. I just happened to be around here, that's all."

"I see," Duke clipped. "Good friend of Freeman. Stayed to see that the story got told straight and that there was no mistake about the girl's name."

"If you think that, you're crazy!" Noel flared. "Anybody here will back me up!"

Bill Duke's cool gray eyes stared at Noel a moment longer; then the detective moved through the crowd. Though other detectives and police were present, instructed to run down any and all clues, the case had officially been given to Duke. It was something he didn't like, because if he had been sucker enough to fall in love with a female killer over the footlights, he didn't want it rubbed in. Nor did he want to believe the story about her. But it was so obvious, there were so many witnesses, he had no choice. He'd be a dog-headed fool, drunk on sentiment, not to believe it.

He walked out through one of the side doors and breathed the cooling night air into his lungs. A runway from this extended to the pike, where a fence kept people who had not paid from entering. Trying to think, his thoughts becoming more and more muddled, he walked in the direction of the fence.

When he reached it, he gazed at the mobs that surged up and down the broad walk. He was no longer trying to think—it was torture to think. He saw a picture of Kay, slim, red-headed, holding a smoking murder gun in her white hands. And then the picture was blotted out.

Suddenly something caught his eye, and he stooped. A silver-colored purse. Nervously he picked it up, snapped it open. There was rouge, a powder puff and other feminine objects; Duke was most interested in a small black address book. He thumbed through the pages. Studios, movie agents, publicity men, the ad-

dresses of girl friends, and Kay Raymond's own Hollywood address. Then, on the last page, scribbled in pencil, the name of a Long Beach hotel.

Bill Duke looked at it a moment beneath the flickering lights of the Silver Spray, and then he was sorry he had found the purse. It was probably the first clue, and according to regulation, it should motivate him forward, put him on the trail which would end in her capture.

He climbed the fence and made his way across the pike to the nearest phone. He called the hotel and found that she was registered there; then he called in to headquarters and told them where he was going, and that if anything came up to let him know.

WHEN he reached the corridor in the hotel, he was still feeling rotten, and he had begun to sing, *"Hey, Babe . . . ."* He reached the room door, put in the key he had gotten from the desk and turned it, his mind dully clicking with the words of the song: *"Hey, babe; say, babe; what are you doing today, babe?"*

He opened the door and stepped inside. His gray eyes swept the room. He saw nothing out of the ordinary. The bed, closet, dresser, chair; the windows that looked down on the street. He felt as though he was intruding.

At that moment, however, he became aware of sound. It had come from somewhere in the room, but it had been so faint that he could not be sure where. Warily he moved forward, his hand inside his coat, fingertips touching the cold butt of his police positive.

The door of the clothes closet opened behind him. A harsh feminine voice snarled: "Lay off the rod, mister; and turn around with your mitts grabbing at the ceiling!"

The police gun leaping into his hand as he spun around, Bill Duke faced the woman. In a flash he saw her tense, pinched face, the mop of blonde hair. She had a snub nose, a pair of glittering blue eyes, and tight, colorless lips. She didn't look more than sixteen. He saw that her finger was tightening; read in her expression that she meant to kill him.

He catapulted forward, weaving, and holding his own fire. Her gun belched, once, twice. The bullets missed, screamed past Duke's ears. Then he was on her, slapping the weapon from her hand, throwing her, with a sweep of his arm, across the room to crash against the bed. He cocked up his right eyebrow.

"That was a pretty close one for you, sister."

She shook her head, struggled to her feet. She was biting her lower lip. "Close one for you, you mean," she snapped. "You lousy flatfoot dick, you!"

"How'd you know I was a cop?" Duke was a little amused.

"Saw your badge when you shoved me over here. How'dya suppose I'd know, sap. Big brave punk, ain't you? Slappin' women around. I think yuh've gotta helluva crust, that's what I think!"

"Listen, babe, I don't give a damn what you think," Duke replied; "and if you don't can some of that would-be tough chatter you're going to find yourself in a jam. Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"I'm Kay Raymond."

Duke's eyebrow went up again. "Oh, I see." He kicked her gun aside, shoved his own into a holster. "One of those things, eh?" Quietly he moved toward her, grasped her shoulders and shook her. "Now speak, you little hell-cat! Who are you?"

"It's none of your business!"

"You want to go to jail?"

"No! You can't put me in your stinkin' jails. I ain't done nothing!"

"Except try to kill a detective. You're going to the cooler and going quick if you don't open up. You're not Kay Raymond, so—"

"All right, punk. What if I'm not. Who cares, eh? Terry Wall was my sweetheart, and Terry Wall got murdered. By Kay Raymond. That suit you?"

"No! Wall was old enough to be your father."

"So *what?*"

Exasperated, Duke shook her again. "Listen, you little—"

The phone clattered shrilly. Duke looked at it. It rang again. He remembered what he had told headquarters. Pushing the girl back up against the wall and holding one hand on her wrist, he answered.

IT was a soft voice, a woman's, and it sounded very frightened. He recognized it at once:

"Is this Detective Lieutenant Bill Duke?"

"Sure."

"I disguised my voice and asked for you. They told me at the police station you were here. You are the only one I know and the only one to whom I can appeal. I must see you at once. It's urgent. A matter of life or death!"

"Is this Kay Raymond?"

"Yes, and I'm at—"

The blonde suddenly bent down and bit Duke's arm until she drew blood. He threw her off, sent her tumbling to the floor. She scrambled to her feet and made a wild dash for the doorway.

Duke started to put down the phone: "Listen, Miss Raymond—Kay—just a minute!"

"I *can't* wait! I tell you my life is in danger!"

The door opened and slammed shut. The blonde imp was gone. Duke thought of chasing, but he couldn't afford to pass up the information he was about to get on the phone. Trembling, sweat streaking down his leathery face, he said:

"All right, Kay. Go ahead. Where are you?"

She told him and it took her a little time, because she did not know Long Beach very well and she wanted to be sure that he would be able to find her. The moment she hung up, Duke rang the desk below and told them to hold the blonde girl when she went through the lobby. The operator said:

"Something went through the lobby, sir, and it might have been blonde—I don't know. It—she was going so fast—"

He slammed up the receiver and left the room. In a moment he was down in the elevator, then rushing through the lobby.

In the street he glanced up and down, but there was no sign of the imp. She had vanished like a wraith in a hurry to haunt a house, and the worst of it was that he had no idea who she really was. As for her description, it was almost hopeless. When the fleet was in, little packages like her came a dime a dozen.

From Kay's directions, Duke had gathered that she was half way to the little deserted town called Seal Beach. She had phoned from a drug store but could not, dare not, stay in it long, she said. She would return to the sand of the beach itself and remain hidden near the breakwater wall.

Duke climbed into his car, and it moved away from the curb with a squealing of tires.

In a few minutes he was driving slowly along the beach wall. It was dark out here, and deserted. Palm trees, tall and stately, moved ominously in the breeze; their dry fronds scraped. The waves crashed against the sand, rolled swishingly back. Gulls darted through the darkness, headed for a night haven.

The homicide dick climbed out of the car. He was not a little nervous at the prospect of meeting Kay Raymond again, though he told himself that he wasn't going to be a fool and fall for any story she gave him. The best place for her was going to be a nice quiet cell until things were straightened out. Bill Duke wasn't going to take any chances with what he considered the world's best job—that of finding killers.

He leaped over the wall and thudded into the sand ten feet below. He brushed his clothing and looked up and down. It was too dark to see far. He started forward, the sand making it hard for him to walk.

He had gone two or three blocks without finding her, and he was just beginning to become a little concerned, when he saw a figure that glittered silver in the moonlight. She was standing against the sea wall, shivering. He hurried over to

her. He stood for a moment, gasping at her beauty: the slim curves that filled out the white satin gown, the soft red hair that had been blown about in the wind.

SHE looked at him a moment through the darkness—to make sure, he guessed. Then she began to talk:

"I probably shouldn't have called you, but I *do* need help. You see your name—on a card in those flowers you were kind enough to send so many times—was the first that came to me. I thought—"

"I know." He was a little bitter. "You thought I'd be a big, easy fish. You'd better come along. We can talk on the way to the station."

"But I *can't* go to jail!" she pleaded. "Don't you see? Everything is against me. I wouldn't have a chance. It looks as though I committed murder and—"

"Yeah, Kay," he said ruefully. "I'm afraid it looks a lot like it: Girl shoots guy and then runs. I mean, you'd have to be pretty thick not to see it, wouldn't you?" He was hoping against hope that she would present some half-way decent alibi.

And she did. She told him the whole thing: "After the shots Jerry Freeman grabbed me and rushed me out the side door. I was so excited I didn't know what was happening. He told me he didn't know why I had done it, but he was going to stand by. He talked like that. He helped me over a fence, and then we were in his car. The way he talked in the car, I thought he must be mad. He said not to worry, everything would be all right. That there was a ship leaving San Pedro tonight, and he would get me a ticket for the Orient. He said I could find plenty of shows and cabarets that would want dancers out there.

"Well, I explained," she went on, "and he only laughed, and said it was all right with him; he forgave me, only the police probably wouldn't. He had taken my gun. Later, when he drove me out to his shack to get the boat ticket, I discovered that besides my gun with blanks, he had another one. I almost screamed then. But I caught myself. I pretended I was anxious to take the boat as he said I should. I was to rinse my hair in something he had, change my face a little, and my name. As for the passport, he said he had that fixed. They aren't strict in Far East ports anyway. I waited for him to go into one of the other rooms, then I broke the window and escaped. I was running, when a car slowed down. The driver asked me if he could help. Just then I heard Jerry Freeman yell. I told the driver I had to get to a drug store to get some medicine quick. I thought Jerry would follow, but apparently he didn't."

"Neat," Duke said, "neat story."

"But it is true!"

He nodded: "Yeah, I suppose so. So Freeman is the killer? What was his motive?"

"I don't know. On my earlier acquaintance with him he mentioned something about making a deal with Wall for the Silver Spray and a chain of similar places that are in Seattle, San Francisco and San Diego. I think a sailor named James Noel was supposed to be in on it."

"And your idea is that they crooked him into selling them big shares without making a payment or something, eh? Else they had handed him a check that would bounce, so they bumped him off first; and with the papers already signed, the dancing places belonged to them."

"I don't know anything about it except what I have told you," she said.

"Okay. Where does Sanders, the publicity agent, come in?"

"I don't know that either."

Duke arched his right eyebrow. "And this letter." He brought the letter he had taken from Wall's corpse out of his pocket.

She seemed amazed, held it under the light. He gave her a flashlight. Her voice was very low and tense when she spoke next.

"I never saw it before. Freeman has specimens of my writing and this—this letter is an obvious forgery."

"Probably good enough to convict you though."

"Undoubtedly," she said coldly. "I don't suppose there is any way to prove it

now, but I scarcely knew Mr. Wall, let alone writing or loving him. I tell you the letter was part of his scheme! Oh, I didn't know a man could be so contemptible. You see, sending me away—"

"You expect me to believe all this, Miss Raymond?" he asked.

"You must!" she implored. "You see, making a success in Hollywood has been a living dream with me. To be mixed up in a murder, to be put in jail—well, the kind of reputation I've been trying to build up would be ruined. Besides, if anything happened and you *didn't* get Jerry, how would my story stand up in court? Whether they convicted me or not, there would be the long weeks in jail, the shame of standing trial for murder, and—"

"That's what *I'm* wondering," Duke interrupted. "How your yarn would stand up."

She was suddenly quiet. "Then you refuse to believe me?"

"If I do—?"

She shrugged. "Then—I guess—well, I guess you'll have to take me. I was a fool to trust you. I should have let Jerry send me off to China. At least I would be protected from disgrace. I called you because—well, I'd thought a lot about you since that day you waited at the stage door. I thought you were a man to whom I could honestly appeal."

He hated to be a damn fool: "You're turning on that old womanhood hooey, but it isn't going to work."

"I was afraid you would think that," she said in almost a whisper. Then: "All right. I'm ready to go with you."

The way she spoke did something to him, and he was not sure what it was. He knew that standing here against the sea wall, the waves breaking on the beach, standing here a few inches from her face, she was much more beautiful than she had appeared on the stage. Something wistful radiated from her. He opened his mouth to speak, but he did not, because his throat was suddenly dry. He was looking at her lips. They were red and glistening.

Suddenly, and he could not help it, something seemed to burst in his chest. His brain seemed to be fevered. He leaned forward and drew her to him in a kiss.

She disengaged. He stood there, unable to look at her.

"Let's go to the police station," she said, a little huskily.

He shook his head. He did not know what was wrong with him, because he had never felt quite like this before.

He said: "No. We're not going to jail. I'm going to hide you. In my own flat, see? Then I'm going to try and chase down this story you've told me. And as for that kiss, well, you can chalk that up as the price you must pay to make a cop do something against rhyme and reason and regulation. For taking the chance of losing the only job he knows how to do."

HE instructed her to keep the lights out in the flat, and not to answer the phone; then he went to the door, his face dead-white, his gray eyes steady. "I'll get in touch with you later, Miss Raymond."

She said: "You started in calling me Kay. You were dashing, and seemed to be sure of yourself then. I wish you would keep on calling me Kay."

He thought musingly, then he looked at her, and slowly he began to smile: "All right, Kay. Be sure and turn out the light as soon as I—"

She got up and came to him. "Bill—Bill Duke," she said softly, "I want you to know that I think you're—well, you're a swell guy. Hundred per cent. I once made a rule about people who try to meet you at the stage door. But if I'd known that you are like you are—"

"Forget that," he replied nervously, "we've got murder to take care of now, and that's what you're most interested in."

"Maybe it isn't, Bill." She turned. "Oh, I don't know. A while ago I was so frightened. And now I'm calm. I feel that everything is all right because—"

"I was hoping maybe you'd feel like that," he told her. "I've got to go now, Kay, good-by."

"Good-by, Bill."

He closed the door and swung down

the hall. Outside, he thought he saw a figure dart behind a tree as he came out. He unbuttoned his coat, moved forward swiftly, drawing the police positive. But when he arrived, he saw nothing! Nerves!

At length he climbed into his car and drove off. He did not know where he was going to find Freeman, but he knew that the first place to go to pick up clues would be the ex-chief petty officer's house. Kay had given him the number.

He drove swiftly, the breeze whipping through the car. It was much later and there were not many people on the broad street down which he drove. When he reached the pike, he saw sailors streaming back to the pier, where they would catch a water taxi. Going in the opposite direction were more sailors, arms linked in those of girls. Stars were shining more brightly, and the moon was in the center of the sky. From far off Duke heard the music of Silver Spray, which evidently had gotten under way again in spite of the murder. He heard laughter, and the chatter of many people; the crashing of waves on the beach, and the distant *chug-chug* of navy motor launches.

He tried to review everything that had happened, but his mind seemed to be fogged. There was only one picture in it and that was of Kay; and only one screaming sentence beneath that picture, and that was: *She is not guilty!* He had to believe that. He did! Hard guy, Bill Duke, falling head over heels in love with a Murder Maiden. The dicks at the station would laugh, but it was not a joke; it might be tragedy.

WHEN he reached Freeman's house, he saw a light from what looked to be the bedroom window. Pulling the car to the curb, Duke climbed out. He thought he saw movement from within the room. He jerked out the police positive and made his way forward, his heart beating fast.

He tried the door. It was locked. He rang, slapped the knocker down. There was no answer to either. At last he resorted to his pass keys. The third one worked. He opened the door with his foot. Gun held a little higher than his hip, his cold gray eyes searched for signs of life.

But the sight before him was quite different. Jerry Freeman, still garbed in the chief petty officer uniform, lay on the floor, his eyes open and staring glassily at the ceiling. His mouth was open, too, gaping open. The tight-skinned face seemed relaxed.

Bill Duke moved slowly forward, his gun still tightly clutched. He glanced about the room. A chair stood near the window opposite him, and in the other corner, a divan. There was a table. Freeman was lying almost under it. The only light came from a reading lamp, and it was dim.

Duke stooped down over the corpse, gun a little loose in his hand. He was staring down when it happened.

A figure rose from behind the divan and blasted away with a gun. It was James Noel, garbed now in civilian dungarees.

The killer responsible for both the corpses of Wall and Freeman, Duke thought, and he was catching him off guard! He tried to rise, tried to bring the police positive up in his hand. But the bullets were coming too fast. Noel hadn't taken any chances. A slug burned its way into Duke's shoulder. The impact sent him careening backward, and to the floor.

Again he tried to rise. He did it by shoving his back to the wall and forcing the pressure of his legs to lift his heavy body. But another screaming slug ripped through his hip, bringing blood, intense pain.

Again the impact slammed him back. He went to the floor, his arms moving wildly, trying to roll over. He saw Noel leap over the divan, point the gun down at his head. Blindly, he tried to reach out at the dungaree-clad legs. Another bullet slammed down mercilessly, grazing his head by a bare fraction of an inch.

Bill Duke was a bloody mess now. He felt death kissing his lips, felt death taking him by the hand. He kept thinking only: *She was right; she is innocent.*

Then there was only confusion and

blackness, and the sense that told him his body was still moving forward, and that he was catching a hold on a pair of legs, and that a man was snarling and striking down with the butt of his weapon.

Noel was toppling backward, and Big Bill Duke, bleeding, half numb, half crazy, was climbing over him, slugging his gun into the sailor's face, pounding down at him. Damn it, there wasn't any cop in any town that could fight better than Duke; and there wasn't any crook or killer that could stand up against him. This knowledge, pride of it, kept him going.

Noel was writhing beneath him now, and struggling to get free; but Duke's fingers were reaching for his throat, inching up toward it. And now—*now* they wrapped about that throat, pressed in, pressed in mercilessly.

Noel gasped, tried to scream. And then something slugged down on the back of Bill Duke's head . . . .

Limply, he tumbled off Noel. Blackness pressed in on him. He struggled to move, but his muscles would not respond. He could not open his eyes. Gradually, everything was beginning to fade. He felt pain, and he could hear, though the sounds in the room were growing dimmer.

He heard harsh laughter. Noel shrieking: "He's dead! Big Bill Duke is dead!" Laughter again.

And then he could hear no more.

THE water must have revived him, and the first thing that popped into his mind was: *"Hey, babe; say babe, what say you become my babe?"* And then came the intensity of his pain, but he could not understand why that song clung to him, kept buzzing in his mind so that he was unable to get it out, even when he was on the verge of dying.

He was in the water, and he was half sitting, half lying on a plank that sloped down into the cold depths. He was shivering. The blood about his head, on hip and shoulder, had hardened. He looked about him through the gloom and saw straight wooden piles. He heard the water swishing through them, felt a cool breeze was on his forehead.

His hands were tied, and there were weights on his feet, but the old plank sloping into the water, and a half-rotted pile against which he was leaning, had saved him from sinking. It was the very plank which made the hole in the old pier. They should have foreseen that possibility. But perhaps they had been in a hurry. And perhaps they thought he was dead, so it wouldn't matter anyway.

From the looks of the barnacle-ridden piles at the under side of the creaky pier, he deducted that he must be in Seal Beach. Gay resort town once, it was closed down the year around now, the roller coaster lying silent, the amusement shacks empty and foreboding, and the pier falling apart, roped off because it was condemned. Only fools and killers walked a pier like this one.

The song kept going around in his mind like a phonograph record. But other thoughts were coming too: Was Kay Raymond all right? Had Noel been able to get away? The way Duke saw it, Noel must have double-crossed Freeman, killed him so that he would be sole owner of the dancing establishments. But the grimmest thing about it all was that if Duke *had* been dead, not only his death, but that of Freeman's, and Wall's could have *all* been laid to Kay, because she had fired the shots in the ballroom.

And where did publicity agent Jack Sanders fit? Had it been he who had slugged Duke just when he had Noel down and was choking the life out of him? Or—and this thought was more ghastly—had it been the little blonde imp he had run into in the hotel room?

He struggled with the bonds about his wrists, using the old but infallible trick of relaxing his muscles instead of struggling, and slipping the rope down over his hands. In a moment he was free and tearing the weights from his feet. How he ached when he moved!

Duke was at last able to crawl up the wet plank to the top of the old pier. He looked around. In one direction stood the tall Seal Beach Stack, from which ships

took their bearings when they went to sea. Far off in the other direction were the flickering lights of Long Beach. It was cold, and he was damp. He stood for a moment, undecided, and shivering still.

And then he began to walk, down beneath the tracks of the deserted roller coaster, across the rotted boards of the pier. The swish of the sea beneath came steadily, unceasingly. He noticed that although no light had begun to break on the horizon, the stars were very faint, and he could scarcely see the moon at all. That meant it was coming morning. He had been down there on that board for hours!

He knew there would be no phone for a mile or two at least, and there was nothing he could do about it. Wearily he started walking through the main street of the town.

When he reached a telephone booth in an all-night drug store on the outskirts of Long Beach, he flopped down in it, utterly exhausted. He searched his wet trousers for a coin, dropped it in the slot, and dialed the police station. The voice of his boss came on.

"Where have you been, Duke?"

"In Seal Beach taking a nap," he said, and he meant it to be dry humor. "I was slugged," he added.

"You're all right?"

"Almost, anyway," Duke told him.

"So long as you're able to phone, you must be all right," the chief went on. "I don't know anything about what you've been doing out there, but I'll tell you this much, Duke: You've made the gravest mistake of your life!"

Duke's voice was husky. "What do you mean?"

"That you tried to hide a murderess in your flat. That little act of charity is going to cost you your job, and I don't know how many years in San Quentin. Do I make myself clear? Complicity. That's a nasty word!"

"You mean you—you've taken Kay?"

"I wish we had!" the chief boomed. "But she escaped again. Some one called and told us where she was. But when we got there, she was gone."

"How did the flat look?" Duke's voice was on edge.

"It was a wreck."

Duke's heart was beating fast. "Then you know what happened? She was kidnaped out of the place! She'll probably be killed! I tell you, chief, she's innocent of these crimes. I've been snooping around and getting slugs through my shoulder, and I know. What the hell do you think I've been doing—sitting in some movie, watching Charley Chan? You ought to know by this time that I know what I'm doing. I've been a dick long enough to know when I'm in the right, and I repeat: That girl is not guilty!"

"Duke you're absolutely crazy! There were a hundred witnesses!"

"Yes, but the gun—"

"We know all about that," the chief snapped. "We finally heard that part of the story, and that's the part you were probably sap enough to fall for. But get a load of this: A guy by the name of Sanders came forward and told of hiring her for the job and giving her blanks. She inspected them herself. Then what did she do? She *changed* them for real bullets. Her alibi was going to be that somebody else shot the guy; that she had blanks. But at the last minute she got scared and beat it. Now that's the straight story. So straight we didn't even hold Sanders. And as for you, Duke, I don't even feel sorry for you. You let yourself in for this. I won't send anybody after you, but I want to see you damn soon. And when I do, I'm afraid I'm going to have to throw away the key. Do you hear me? You're not a cop any more . . . ."

Duke hung up while the chief was still talking. He gazed bleakly at the wall of the booth in front of him.

"Hey, babe; say, babe . . . ."

THE numbness began to wear off. "Not a cop any more, eh?" he mumbled.

He stood up, but it was only for a moment. The pain of his wounds became more intense. He sank down in the little

seat in the booth and gasped for breath. Then he kicked the door open and waved the pharmacist over. The smallish man garbed in white hurried to him.

"Few bullet scratches—" Duke began.

"Who are you?" the pharmacist demanded sharply. It was apparent from the look in the little man's glowing brown eyes that he thought Duke a criminal who'd had a scrape with the law.

Duke searched for his badge and showed it. The druggist gulped. "Yes sir. I'll prepare something right away, sir. If you would let me see the wounds— Perhaps I could call an ambulance for you after I have administered first aid?"

"No," Duke said from deep in his throat, "no—I've got to go on."

And then there was silence, during which the little white-clad drug-store man looked at the detective, spots of red touching his white cheeks, his lips trembling just a little. He opened his mouth, as though to speak; as though to say he had heard of dicks who were like that—who kept going. But, in the end, the words failed him, and, a little embarrassed, he turned to go back into the pharmacy.

Left to his own resources for a moment, Bill Duke tried to think. Clues. Damn, he had to have clues! He had to find Kay. That was more important than anything else. He thought of the white-haired publicity agent, Sanders. Maybe he would know something. Maybe—it was just a bare chance—he would be home. But Duke was certainly in no condition to go to him right now.

He looked Sanders up in the book and telephoned. When the newspaperman's voice came on the wire, Duke put a handkerchief over the mouthpiece, made his voice whiny.

"This is Noel—you know, Sailor Jim Noel, Freeman's friend. Freeman's dead, and I've got to see you right away!"

"But I—but I—"

"You might be sorry if you don't come!"

"All right," Sanders relented. "Where are you?"

Bill Duke told him, and hung up. There was a grim smile on his worn face.

DUKE'S coat was off, and the pharmacist was putting on the last patches around his shoulder wound, when the detective suddenly leaned forward and jerked the damp coat off the oil heater on which the druggist had put it to warm. He ran his hand along the back of it.

"What do you make of this, Doc?"

"Looks like face powder. Somebody must have dumped a whole box of it on you. A compact full, that is."

Duke's heart started beating fast; he felt blood pumping into his temples. "Look, Doc," he went on nervously, "look closer, see what *shade* it is. I mean, what complexion woman would use it?"

"I'll inspect it under a microscope if you want," the druggist offered.

"That'll be fine," Duke said. As the man made off with his coat, he began thinking. If the powder had belonged to Kay, it meant that at some point she had been in the murder car with him. Perhaps it had been like this: After he'd been knocked out, the informant who had tipped his attackers off that he was coming, and who had tipped them *also* that Kay was in his apartment, advised that they go for Kay at once. So they had put Duke in the car, driven it right through Long Beach, and within a few minutes after he had been knocked out, snatched her. *She had been in the same car in which he lay wounded and bleeding, consciousness gone!*

That was valuable, for it meant that she must be somewhere back in the deserted ruins of Seal Beach, either dead or held captive. He hoped for the latter, and based his hope on the fact that they could not harm her and discard her body as they had his, for *if she were found dead,* their setup would be ruined. Her dead body would be proof that she was innocent, and police would look to them! So she must be alive—and somewhere in Seal Beach. She must be, if his deduction about the powder clue was correct . . . .

"Theatrical powder. I would say a red-haired woman of fair complexion had used it. That is, if the powder were used correctly."

Duke looked up. The druggist had spoken. He was still holding the coat.

"That's her, then," Duke whispered. "Hurry up, Doc. I've got to get going!"

At that moment, Jack Sanders, his wrinkled face tense, his small black eyes glittering like a monkey's, came into the drug store. Duke slipped on the coat, climbed to his feet. Sanders turned to go.

"Just a minute, publicity man," Duke called sarcastically. "I want to see you."

"I—I—" Sanders choked.

Duke strode toward him. "Sure, I know. Thought you'd find your friend Noel here. Well, it was me who called. I've been wanting to see you, because you're going to do some talking, understand? *Truth* this time! I mean about Kay Raymond."

Sanders was shaken. "I swear on my word of honor," he whined, "that if she's innocent I didn't know anything about it. I really didn't. What I told the cops is only what Jerry Freeman told me. He said he went outside with her and saw her put something in the gun, but that he had supposed at the time they were the blanks I had given her."

"When did Freeman tell you this?"

"Hours ago. He said he felt sorry for the poor kid, even though she had committed the murder, and he was going to try and help her."

"I think you're lying!"

"I'm not! I swear I'm not! Freeman hired me to get a girl to do that job. He suggested that I get Kay Raymond because he liked her and wanted to see that she got a break. Well, I did, I thought it was all on the up and up. I wasn't aware that she knew Wall more than slightly, and I certainly didn't think she had any motive to murder him!"

"She didn't," Duke clipped. "That's the hell of it."

Sanders was trembling. "What I told the police," he said, "I actually believed to be true."

Duke was thinking. He arched his right eyebrow and looked at Sanders. "Have you a car?"

"Yes. It's out front."

"All right. We're going to use it. I think I know the vicinity in which Kay is being held."

"You mean—you trust me, then?" Sanders asked, a light of thanks coming into his eyes.

Duke looked at him for a moment. "I think so." He turned. "Doc—look, you've been a good guy and you're going to get paid for it. You must have a gun around here you use in case of holdup. Mine's gone. I was wondering—"

"Sure," said the little pharmacist, and hurried to get the weapon for him. It was a bulky .45.

"Loaded?"

"Yes, sir."

SANDERS drove, and Bill Duke sat beside him, feeling slightly better. They reached the aging piers in Seal Beach just as a dark, muggy-gray dawn broke over the water, faintly silhouetting the lines of anchored vessels of war, the thick-set freighters and trim passenger liners of the busy coast.

But when they parked the car and climbed out of it, the search seemed suddenly impossible. There were dozens of empty houses lining the streets, old and boarded up; there were the little stands, also boarded, that had once been pier concessions. The roller coaster frame seemed like a giant skeleton. Wearily, Duke and Sanders tramped across the rotted boards of the pier.

Then suddenly, through the swirling fog that hovered close over the water, came the even hum of a motor-boat engine. Duke spun about, his body tense, and waited. He could see nothing, though the boat must have been close. It must have been small and hovering beneath the shadow of the pier.

"Come on," he whispered, and started forward. Sanders followed.

Then he stopped. A yellow gleam of light was penetrating the fog. It seemed pointed in no direction, but it grew steadily brighter. Then it began blinking on and off. Bill Duke stared. He felt his heart thumping. For a moment he saw no reason for the light and the blinking, and then it came to him all at once—

semaphore, Morse Code by blinker. Though Freeman, Duke told himself, was dead, he had been a navy man; and so was killer Noel. A dick in a navy town must know those signals, too. It was apparent the light was flashing over and over:

Attention. Attention. Attention.

Duke fumbled for a flashlight he had taken from the drug store. "Wait," he whispered to Sanders. "Whoever that is in the boat, he's going to lead us to where Kay is held!"

"How?" Sanders asked.

But Duke put his finger to his lips and kept watching. Now the light, though no answering signal had flashed, was spelling out a message:

Boat is ready. Bring cargo at once. Boat is ready.

For a moment Duke's heart sank. Perhaps this was the signal of a smuggler who knew nothing of the murders. Nevertheless, he turned on the flashlight, and crouching down so that he could not be seen behind the light, began snapping it on and off:

Come ashore. You are urgently needed. Come ashore.

The light from the boat wavered for a moment, then went off. Duke waited, cold sweat on his forehead. He heard the chugging motor of the boat go silent. In a minute there were footsteps on the pier. He saw a man hurry past him. Leaping to his feet, he signaled Sanders. "Come on," he whispered.

When the boatman reached the door of a small cottage not far from the pier, Bill Duke stared, unable to believe his eyes. For the fog was beginning to lift, and he could make out the features: the tightly-drawn skin, patent-leather hair, aquiline nose and brown eyes. It was the handsome ex-chief petty officer. It was Jerry Freeman, whom Duke had thought was a corpse. Freeman, *alive and walking!* He was still garbed in his blue uniform and white cap.

Duke had the .45 gripped tight in his hand. He motioned Sanders to stay back, and, sucking in breath, rushed forward. Freeman had already entered the old house by removing a board from the door and turning the knob. Duke landed his good shoulder against that door a moment later and tumbled into the room.

The scene flashed before his eyes even as he snapped into action: Noel, bony, narrow black eyes filled with sleep, leaning back against the wall dozing, still garbed in his dungarees. Two figures on the floor, bound and gagged—Kay with her soft red hair; the freckled, blonde imp with whom Duke had sparred in the hotel.

Freeman jerked about, surprise crossing his face. He seemed as amazed to see Duke alive as Duke had been to see him a moment before.

Then hell broke loose.

Noel snapped forward in the chair and leaped to his feet. He fumbled with his gun. Freeman jerked out his weapon and opened fire. But Bill Duke had not stayed to be a target. He pumped the trigger of the .45.

The lead screamed; fire burst from the gun-muzzle. Blood gurgled from Freeman's lips. He grasped his shoulder, spun around and hit the floor.

DUKE whirled toward the bony sailor in the dungarees. It had all happened in a second, and Noel, deathly afraid now, had calculated swiftly. He pointed his gun down at Kay.

"If you shoot," he gasped, "she dies. Drop your gun, dick—"

Duke stared for a moment, his gray eyes flickering. Then he let the police positive drop from his hand.

A gun roared at him as his own hit the floor. But Bill Duke was no longer there. He was catapulting forward. He landed down on Noel, smashed his fist square into the bony sailor's face, clutched at his gun and jerked it away. Noel kicked out, and Duke, getting again to his feet, shoved him back with his foot.

There was a sharp report from the door! A bullet jerked Duke around, spinning like a top, and then sent him crashing to the floor. He held Noel's gun tightly, looked up into the blazing eyes of

Jerry Freeman. For a moment he was paralyzed. Freeman had risen again!

Another bullet charged at him, but already Duke was crawling forward, the gun in his hand. He maneuvered it up with a quick and expert twist of his wrist. His finger touched the trigger. A startled look flashed across Freeman's face. He clutched his stomach.

Duke managed to get to his feet. Freeman was sagging against the wall, holding his stomach with one hand, trying to bring his gun up with the other. Duke clipped him on the jaw with his fist. Freeman dropped his weapon and thumped to the floor.

Jack Sanders, his wrinkled face horror-stricken, came in through the door. "I've got to help—" Then he saw the writhing killers on the floor and stared down, silently. In a moment, admiration in his black eyes, he looked up at Bill Duke. "Freeman wasn't very dead, was he?"

"Not very," Duke said, handcuffing Freeman and Noel.

He released Kay and helped her to her feet. She sank down in a chair, unable for a moment to speak. Duke untied the blonde girl. She was by no means speechless.

"Them dirty, rotten killers," she ejaculated. "They were waiting for a motorboat. Freeman went after it. They were going to take us down to the San Clemente Islands and hide our bodies where *nobody* would find them. That's what they said. Geez, I'm sorry I worked for them. I thought Kay Raymond had killed my father. I watched your flat, Mr. Duke, and I tipped off Freeman because I thought he was a friend of my father. Then after they had taken her, I called the police so they'd know what you'd been doing—hiding a killer. Geez, I'm sorry!"

Bill Duke arched an eyebrow. "So you're Peggy Wall? Why did you try to tell me you were his sweetheart when you came to the hotel room to kill Kay?"

"Because I wanted to keep my identity secret until I had avenged my father."

KAY RAYMOND looked up. "You look terrible, Bill," she said softly. "I'm sorry I've put you through all this." She closed her lovely green eyes for a moment, then opened them. "I shudder to think of it. When they came to your flat to kidnap me, they had you *in the car*, then. You were unconscious, and I thought I'd never see you again. They caught Peggy here, and had to tie her up when she found out the truth. Noel watched us here while Jerry Freeman disposed of you, then went after the boat."

"Yeah," Duke came in, "with that boat he was going to take you and Peggy out where you'd *never be found*. The cops would think you had disappeared, had *run away from the murder*. That would seem to make your guilt a cinch, which would clear Freeman. He was probably going to run you out here to the San Clemente Islands. They're unpopulated; nothing grows on them. They're barren and desolate the year around. Lying in one of the San Clemente Island caves, you'd never have been found!"

Kay Raymond shuddered, and Peggy Wall gulped.

"But to get back to what happened," Duke went on, "Peggy was following me around, thinking *you*, Kay, were guilty and Freeman innocent. That was why she called Freeman up and told him I was coming over. They knew then—Freeman and Noel—that I was getting too hot, so they decided to kill me."

Duke and Sanders lifted the killers to their feet. Freeman was groaning in agony and holding his stomach; Noel, blood-spattered, was grimly silent. Duke looked at them.

"Neat little setup, wasn't it?" Duke went on. "You knew I'd be around, so you laid a trap for me. Freeman was to lie on the floor with something that looked like blood running from his neck; and when I bent over to look at him closer—because the light was dim—it was supposed to be a cinch for you to pop up and have a dead shot on me, wasn't it, Noel? Only I was a bit quicker than you had reckoned I'd be, and that was tough. But as for you Freeman, in all my experience with killers, I never knew of one so rotten that he'd frame a girl for murder just so he could get possession of a chain of dance halls!"

Jerry Freeman looked up, his agonized face white. "Oh, shut up! I was going to see that she got to China. A lot of women around this place could ask for worse."

Kay cut in on him. "I told you about the gun I saw him with before I escaped from his house, Bill. It was *that* he used while I fired blanks. I'm sure the caliber of it is different from the one I used, and ballistics can prove it was he who killed Wall. I saw him throw something away while we were driving in the car—while you were unconscious. I was trying to put powder on you so that if you ever recovered, you would know I had been near. What he threw away looked like a towel."

"Something he used to cover the gun when he fired it in the dance hall," Duke said. "Do you remember where it was he threw it?"

"Oh, no. Everything was so confused, so—"

"It's all right," Bill Duke said quietly. "As you've mentioned, ballistics are proof enough to hang them both—if you and Sanders and Peggy and I aren't enough as witnesses to their crime."

Peggy Wall suddenly screamed and rushed at Freeman. It was all Duke could do to pull her off.

"He killed my father!" she sobbed.

Freeman, white and shaken, sagged back, kept holding his stomach. The bony Noel, his black eyes glittering, was silent, and stood straight.

Bill Duke wiped his forehead of sweat, looked at Kay, and then turned to Sanders. "I guess you'd better get the police so we can run these rats in."

THE chief said he hadn't meant to be so harsh on the phone. Bill Duke didn't know whether he had or not—not that it mattered. Duke's reputation was unimpaired, and because everything had happened so rapidly, Kay wasn't made to look bad in the papers.

Later, when some of Duke's wounds had healed, he and Kay went for a walk down the pike. Kay, her lovely red hair blowing softly in the breeze, her green eyes very sober, was trying to decide whether she wanted to be an actress or a cop's wife.

"It is not as though you were an *ordinary* detective," she said.

"That's right," he said, "and we can have a cottage on the waterfront, and—"

But suddenly he stopped, stiffened. A loudspeaker was booming out on the pike from a bowling alley. Sailors and their girls were milling up and down. The *crack-crack-crack* of target-practice shots blended with the sounds of a roller coaster's squealing wheels, the hoarse voice of a girl trying to sell ice cream, and the laughter and chatter of people. But Bill Duke heard only the song in the loud speakers. It was blaring:

"Hey, babe; say, babe; say you'll be my babe . . . ."

Stunt Devil

By James Dyson

When tragic Doris Poore asked Private Detective Colin Corey to solve her husband's dare-devil death, the sleuth prepared a frameup with murder itself. For Corey had to let airplane cameramen photograph him, high in the air, clutched in the talons of the Grim Reaper—without a parachute. . . .

"PERHAPS I should have seen a lawyer instead of coming to you," Doris Poore said to Colin Corey, "but since you were a stunt man with the others before becoming a private detective, I thought you would understand better. I took it for granted that the matter was closed; but now I don't know whether I'm up against murder, criminal negligence, attempted blackmail, or just Phil Sowers' idea of a joke. It's mighty serious to me though, Colin. It's *my* husband that's dead."

Corey nodded understandingly and patted her hand.

"You came to me," he assured her, "because I'm your friend. That's the way it should be."

A warm smile flashed through the tragedy in her eyes, as she lowered her slim figure into the chair beside Corey's desk. Her voice, gentle as it was, drowned out a faint click and a soft whirring of well-oiled gears as she demanded:

"Why should Phil keep silent for a year and a half, and then do a thing like this to me, just as the wound is beginning to heal?"

"That's easy to answer," Corey said grimly. "Because he's a rat! But you haven't told me yet just what happened."

"You know how Dick died?"

"Just what you and others have told me."

Doris bit her lip. Tears welled into her eyes. She dabbed at them with a lacy wisp of handkerchief before she went on:

"Dick assured me it would be an easy stunt. He was to shoot Unamak Rapids in a canoe. They were to stretch a rope, with loops attached, every few feet across the river, two hundred yards above the

falls. Dick would get his arm through a loop as the canoe passed, and they would pull him ashore."

"But he missed the line and went over the falls," Corey finished for her.

She nodded. "They told me it was an accident, and I believed them."

"And now?"

"Yesterday Phil Sowers called me on the phone and said he had proof that it wasn't an accident. He told me a certain person would be glad to pay plenty, rather than have him 'spill the beans.' He asked me if I'd divide the money with him, and I said that if he could prove it was the studio's fault, and they made a settlement with me, he could have half of what I received. Then he suggested that I go to his apartment this morning to talk it over, and he would show me the proof."

"And you went?"

"Yes—I went. He wasn't home. I got him at the phone at the Rialto Studios, and he told me to forget it. I became insistent, and he got quite nasty."

"I'll talk to Sowers right away," Corey assured her. "Phil was on location at Unamak at the time, so it's just possible that he does have something. Being a stunt man himself, he would know why another man's stunt went wrong."

DORIS POORE rose to leave, and standing beside him, she made Corey look small—so small you wondered how he ever got by as a private investigator. That is, you wondered until you learned that for ten years he had been Hollywood's most sensational daredevil—the man who doubled for actresses in those old serial thrillers—the man who took on the stunts that others refused, and got away with them because he used his head as well as his nerve and muscle.

"Understand, Colin," Doris told him, "it isn't the money I'm after, much as I need that. I just want to be satisfied that Dick died as they said he did—died trying too hard to make a nest egg for me and the baby."

"I understand," Corey replied. "But if some one's negligence or malice made you a widow, that person should be held responsible."

He stopped talking suddenly, and a boyish grin spread over his face. He reached over among the books on his desk and pressed a button, lifted a rather large 16 mm. Ciné Kodak for her to see, and announced:

"You're in the movies now."

She blushed a little and said: "Oh Colin, that was cruel of you. I—I had no idea you were taking my picture. You should have let me touch up my face a bit first."

"Your face is beautiful just the way it is," he replied gallantly. "But I assure you that the photography was quite unintentional. It works automatically when some one sits in the chair, and I was so delighted to see you that I forgot to turn the thing off. You see, I've been quite a camera nut ever since my movie days, and this was just a little experiment I rigged up."

"How I envy you men," Doris laughed. "You always remain little boys; always play, even at work."

"But this is quite serious," Corey protested. "I use it at times when I question people. When they get through talking, I have expert lip-readers—deaf mutes—translate the silent lip movements into speech. It works, too. The photographic records have already been admitted as evidence in court. They furnish excellent proof that a conversation actually took place. They're even better than dictaphone transcriptions, at times, for they prove who did the talking.

"The special size camera takes care of three hundred feet of 16 mm. film. When I raise enough money, I'm going to have the camera rigged for sound. I have other cameras, disguised, that I carry with me when I go out, just in case. . . ."

"Colin, you're a genius," Doris exclaimed enthusiastically. "I do hope you'll invite me to the preview."

"I certainly will," he replied. "But right now I'd better go out to Hollywood and talk to Sowers."

When Doris had gone, he took a .38 automatic from his desk drawer, examined it, found it empty. He slapped

a clip of cartridges into the butt and placed the weapon in his shoulder holster.

COREY found Sowers on the Rialto lot. They were getting ready to shoot a scene. Cameras were placed before an outdoor set representing a five-story hotel. Sowers was conferring with Leopold Riskoff, the director, when Corey interrupted.

Sowers' hawklike face wore a mask of annoyance as Corey led him aside. Riskoff tore at his sleek hair and cursed at the delay.

"Make it snappy!" Sowers growled. "We've got to shoot this scene while we have the sun."

"It's about that phone call you made to Doris Poore yesterday," Corey said seriously. "It's got her worried. I came here to get an explanation."

"Oh, that!" Sowers exclaimed blandly.

"Yes, that!"

"Listen," Sowers' tone was confidential. "You wait right here until I get through this stunt. I've got an angle you ought to know about. I couldn't explain it to Doris; she doesn't know the racket like you and I."

"Okay," Corey granted, "but don't try to give *me* the slip."

Sowers gave him a look that said, "Nuts!" and returned to the group around the cameras. Leading the still gesticulating Riskoff by the arm, he drew him away from the others and engaged him in an earnest conversation, with frequent glances at Corey.

Corey became suddenly interested in the book he was carrying. He held it in front of his chest and studied the backbone of the gaudy jacket.

Sowers broke away presently, to climb the ladder behind the set. Riskoff hesitated a moment, then walked behind the set himself, conferred a moment with the two wire men loafing at the foot of a plank ramp. The larger of the two nodded, and his eyelid lowered an instant. The smaller one seemed to protest a moment, then shrug as Riskoff turned his back.

Sowers was now at the top. He reached up and grabbed the handle of an umbrella that dangled from a boom rigged high above the set.

A stunt veteran himself, Corey got the layout at a glance. The tip of the umbrella was secured to a wire, which ran over a pulley below the boom, then down to the two men behind the set. Sowers would grab the parasol handle and step off, hanging on while the wire men lowered him to the ground. The wire was amply strong, yet so fine it would not be picked up by the cameras.

On the screen it would appear that the comedian, for whom Sowers was doubling, was using the umbrella as a parachute to float gently to earth.

A good gag, but not much of a stunt. Anyone could hang onto that handle long enough to be lowered safely.

Riskoff waved an arm, yelled: "Ready?"

Sowers looked back and repeated the question. The two men behind the set grabbed the wire, braced their feet, and answered: "All set!"

"Shoot!" Sowers shouted.

Riskoff barked: "Camera!"

In an excellent imitation of the famous comedian's mannerisms, Sowers held the parasol high and walked to the edge of the set, teetered there a while in comic indecision. Then he stepped off.

There was an instant of silence, followed by the scream of wire flying unchecked over the pulley, an anguished cry from behind the set, a squirming figure hurtling through the air, a nauseating thud.

A strangled gasp arose from the little knot of onlookers, changed to excited shouts and the patter of running feet. No need to run. There was no life in that broken, grotesque heap that a moment before had been Phil Sowers.

THERE were plenty of willing hands to pick up the body. The cause of the tragedy lay behind the set. Corey hurried in that direction.

The smaller of the two wire men, a blond youth named Asmus, came around the edge of the set at a stumbling trot,

gazing at his raw, bloody hands, blubbering.

Corey grasped his shoulder, turned him away from the crowd about the corpse, said: "Better get over to the dispensary with those hands, kid."

Asmus looked up through tear-dimmed eyes, mumbled: "We shouldn't have done it—that way! We couldn't—hold him!"

"Never mind that now. Get over to the dispensary."

The kid nodded dully and stumbled off at the same dazed trot.

Dominick Banta, the veteran wire man, big, beefy and bald, came along. His usually ruddy face was pale, oozing an icy dew.

Corey glanced down, grabbed him by the wrist and ordered: "Let me see your hands!"

Banta yanked the wrist free, continued the upward motion with a balled fist that landed on Corey's chin—a crudely delivered uppercut, but with two hundred pounds behind it.

Caught entirely unawares, outweighed sixty pounds, Corey sat down hard, his book clattering metallically to the ground. He stayed down a moment shaking his head, blinking the film from his eyes.

Banta didn't wait.

Corey picked himself up, recovered the book and placed it tenderly in his pocket, then went into the milling crowd around the body, looking for the giant wire man. He finally spied him being led around the corner of a sound stage by Riskoff. When Corey got there, the pair had disappeared.

Fifteen minutes later, Corey located Riskoff in a dressing room, drinking bonded bourbon from a bottle.

The dapper director was not a popular figure. A former stunt aviator, and a good one, he held his present, well-paying job because he had married Gregory Graulin's only daughter. Graulin, sole owner of the Rialto studios, was past seventy and feeble. Riskoff's wife was his sole heir; so people were very polite to Riskoff, and the director took that as a tribute to his self-admitted genius. He now offered the bottle to Corey with a patronizing air.

Corey shook his head and demanded: "Where's Banta?"

"I sent him home to get his hands fixed up. Wire burns. Too bad about Sowers."

"Yes, what went wrong?"

"You saw it," Riskoff answered. "The boys couldn't hold the wire. Phil shouldn't have changed it."

"Changed what?"

"Why, you're an old hand at the game. You know how they work those gags. They always crank slowly, and have the wire men walk up an incline."

"Yes?"

"Well, that's the way this was originally planned."

"Why was it changed?"

Riskoff shook his head, in exaggerated patience, and explained:

"When Sowers got through talking to you, he came to me and said I should tell the boys to pay the wire through their hands—said walking with it slowed the action too much. I argued with him, but a stunt man has the say as to how he'll do his job."

Corey nodded for him to continue.

"I didn't have time to make an issue of the matter. The sun was getting low, and it would cost a couple of thousand to get this gang back here tomorrow. I just told the boys what Sowers wanted. What the hell, it's his neck!"

"Was his neck," Corey corrected.

"Yeh, too bad! Maybe it was just his time."

Corey nodded. "And right nicely timed, too!"

"Meaning what?" Riskoff's voice was hard.

"Meaning that Banta was head wire man when something slipped up at Unamak and Dick Poore went over the falls. Sowers let it be known that there was something screwy about that so-called accident. I came out here to talk with Sowers, to see the proof he said he had, and Sowers has an accident before we can get together—and again Banta is head wire man."

"The trouble with you," Riskoff sneered, "is that you've been a detective so long you're suspicious of everything. I was director at Unamak myself, and

I assure you that Dick's death was just as accidental as Sowers' was today."

"Yes," Corey agreed, "that's what I was thinking."

RISKOFF'S bottle-filled hand paused halfway to his mouth. His metallic black eyes narrowed in shrewd, quizzical wonder.

"You're a hard bird to figure out, Corey," he said at length, dryly.

"Shouldn't be," Corey grunted. "I've put my cards on the table. I'm going over to Sowers' apartment now to look for that proof he spoke of. Then I'm going to get Banta and make him talk. I've an idea that the Rialto studios will pay compensation to Doris Poore for her husband's death when I get through."

"You really flatter Banta," Riskoff laughed.

Corey merely shrugged, turned to go. He was halfway down the corridor when Riskoff hailed him. Corey waited while the director caught up, placed a familiar arm over his shoulder.

"I say, old man," he began oilily, "you wouldn't mind helping a fellow out, and at the same time making yourself a buck, would you?"

"Always willing to listen."

"Sowers put me in a hell of a hole by getting himself killed today," Riskoff went on. "He was supposed to do another job tomorrow. You're an old hand at the game. I'll give you five grand for the stunt—just one day's work."

Corey's face remained a blank mask as he asked: "What's the layout?"

"Just a parachute jump and pickup by another plane," Riskoff explained airily. "You jump at four thousand. I'll tail a grapple behind my plane and hook your 'chute. Then you climb up the 'chute and rope, into my plane."

"You're flying the pickup ship yourself?"

"Yeh," Riskoff replied. "I've flown you before on plane-change stunts. Thought you'd have confidence if I was at the stick."

"It does make me a little surer," Corey agreed in a toneless voice. "I can use five thousand. What time tomorrow?"

"You'll do it then? Fine! Riskoff beamed. "With Sowers gone, you're the only one around here can do a tough stunt like that. Be at the field at nine. You'd better get home now and get some sleep."

"Glad you suggested it. You lay off the bottle."

"Fair enough!"

"Flying your own plane?" Corey asked.

Riskoff said he was and took Corey into the office, where the usual agreement was drawn up.

COREY didn't go home, however. It was now getting dark, and he had a lot to do. He drove directly to Sowers' apartment. The dead stunt man had lived alone in a bungalow court at the foot of Hollywood Hills. When she heard the news of her tenant's death, the manager furnished a pass key and would have acted as a voluble escort had not Corey's glare sent her mumbling into her own quarters.

Corey didn't know exactly what he was searching for, but he deduced that anything a man regarded as "proof" in a lawsuit would be kept under lock and key. Trunks, on a high shelf over the wardrobe, looked like the best bet.

It was in the second trunk, a small steamer affair. Corey recognized it at a glance for what it was. The coiled section of three-inch rope was the sort of life-line that would have been used at Unamak. Secured to the rope at three-foot intervals, were smaller lines, ending in loops that had been coiled into tight twists by the shrinking effect of water.

Tied together in the trunk, was a stack of metal rings, looking very much like bicycle tire rims, but only eight inches in diameter. Still pasted to the rings were the original paper labels of the manufacturer.

Those rings, metal spreaders to keep the loops open, had never been placed, or water would have washed away the labels.

A motion picture of Dick Poore's death flickered through Corey's brain. Dick had sped down the forty-mile-an-hour current of the rapids in a frail

canoe, while cameras with telescopic lenses clicked on the shore. His hands numb from the icy, splashing waters, he had dropped his paddle at the last moment, had poised to grab the life-line.

He grabbed and hung on while the swift current ripped the canoe from under him. He reached under the surging water to find a loop—a place in which he could insert his arm and secure himself while he was being dragged to safety.

But there was no loop—only a double twist of spliced line that could not be uncoiled with stiffening fingers. He heaved himself over, clutched at the next dangling line. No loop there either.

Dick Poore's frozen fingers hung on as long as they could against the battering current. The raging torrent finally dragged him from the line, dashed him over the falls. They found his body hours later.

It was Dominick Banta's job to place those rings. Phil Sowers knew he hadn't done so. He had obtained the evidence that would cost the studio half a million dollars if Doris Poore should sue; evidence that would cost Banta a well-paying job and forever blacklist him in Hollywood.

Why Sowers had kept silent all these months, Corey didn't know; but it wasn't hard to guess . . . .

Corey gathered up the evidence, tapped his pocket to make sure the book he carried was still there, and, after leaving the key with the manager, strode out to his sedan.

He opened the front door, tossed the rope and rings toward the back seat, started to climb in.

There was a sudden stirring in the rear. Corey's scalp tightened as he looked up into the muzzle of a revolver, its nickeled surface reflecting the light of a distant street lamp.

"Keep your mitts up! Get inside behind the wheel!"

The voice belonged to Dominick Banta.

Corey complied. There was nothing else to do. He was already too far inside to back out of the car in time. The weapon was too far away to be grabbed quickly. He inched his hand, though, toward the shoulder holster under his coat.

"Don't do it!" Banta warned. "Don't go for that gun, or I'll blast you through the windshield!"

His hands raised as far as the top would permit, Corey sat down and slid behind the wheel.

There was a moment of stiff, heavy silence, that Banta broke with a satanic chuckle.

"Nice work, Corey," he laughed. "It's a good thing I got here in time to see you go inside. You brought the stuff out to me, saved me the trouble of looking for it myself.

"Always like to help a pal," Corey jeered.

"Pal, hell! You'd fry me in a minute if I gave you the chance. Don't move—not a quiver now. I'm reachin' for your gun."

Immediately, there came the cold pressure of a muzzle on the back of Corey's neck, and the chill sent shivers dancing down his spine.

BANTA reached over cautiously from behind and lifted Corey's automatic from its holster. Corey glanced down at the groping hand, saw it was covered with a thin, white cotton glove—the kind pall-bearers wear. He could see that the hand was not bandaged, nor the glove stained.

His own elevated hands itched to grab at the thick wrist, but he resisted the suicidal impulse.

"What now?" he asked.

"Now I'm going to blow your head off," Banta answered grimly. "I know you're wise that I let Sowers drop—knew it when you asked to see my hands. This stuff shows me you know why. If Phil hadn't been so smart about that Unamak slip-up, you and him might both have lived."

"Well, that's the way it goes," Corey said, trying to keep a cheerful tone in his voice. "Here today, gone tomorrow!"

Headlights approached from in front.

"Gone just as soon as that car gets past," Banta contradicted. "And if you make a false move, and the guy stops, why that's just one more I got to kill."

"That's the trouble with murder," Corey observed, "once you start it, you have to keep on doing it to cover up; but you can't always cover up."

The car was past now.

"Can the preachin'!" Banta growled. "I ain't slippin' up this time. I wear gloves—no fingerprints. I shoot you with your own gun—no tracin' the bullets to me."

The hopeless stupor Corey had been fighting changed to a fierce feeling of elation. He couldn't let the fellow change his mind on that last idea. He said:

"You're smarter than I thought you were, Banta."

Then he watched the shadows behind through the rear-view mirror, felt the pressure of one gun go off his neck, to be replaced immediately by the fresh coldness of the other muzzle. He felt Banta shift the grip from his left hand to his right and knew that the first gun had been laid down momentarily.

His nerves keyed for that moment, his muscles tense, Corey spun around. He ignored the muzzle of his own automatic against his neck, for he remembered he had not pulled back the slide when he loaded the gun in his office—there was no cartridge in the chamber.

But Banta didn't know that. He found out in a moment, when he squeezed desperately on the trigger and nothing happened. He grabbed his own gun from the seat where he had placed it, but not before Corey had a chance to swing around in the front seat.

Corey seized Banta's left wrist in his own right hand as the frantic wire man raised his own revolver. Banta pulled the trigger blindly, and the air inside the car seemed to tear wide open. Powder, scorching gases, singed Corey's ear, as the bullet plowed through the top of the sedan.

But not even that blast in his ear could slow Corey's lightning movements. Holding the imprisoned wrist firmly, he grasped the hand holding the revolver in his own left, bent it back suddenly.

In a frenzy of thwarted murder, Banta kept on shooting. But the pressure on his hand had turned the gun upon himself. His second bullet plowed through his own throat.

Banta lived for an hour, but did no more talking; and Corey would have liked to talk.

BACK in the city, Corey dashed into his own small laboratory, which adjoined his office. Reaching into his pocket, he tossed the book on the table.

"See what we have here, will you?" he asked.

David Lundgren, his assistant, who did his developing, glanced at the jacket and said:

"Looks like *Gone With the Wind.*"

"I almost was," Corey laughed, "and I might be tomorrow. Right now, I've got plenty to do."

He outlined what he was working on.

"Rush that job over to the institute as soon as it's ready," he instructed, "even if you have to get the mutes out of bed. When they have it doped out, rush the results to Cahuenga Airport. Bring the police if the film shows anything to justify such action. I'll be at the airport the rest of the night."

"Right."

Corey sprinted to his office and unhooked the wire from the visitor's chair. He reloaded the camera with an oversize reel of motion-picture film. Placing the camera and the wire in his pocket, he dashed for the car.

The airport where Riskoff kept his plane was a private one. It was now nearly midnight. A sleepy watchman was the only person present. The fellow had been around a long time, and he remembered Corey.

"Listen, Jake," Corey said to him, "Phil Sowers got killed today. I'm taking his place on a stunt tomorrow. I've got to make a jump. Have you got two 'chutes around here?"

"Sure. What do you want, a twenty-two and a twenty-eight?"

"That's right."

Jake disappeared in the hangar office, to emerge presently lugging two packed parachutes.

"Got a place I can fold them myself?" Corey asked.

"Oh, they're packed okay," Jake protested mildly. "Scotty does 'em. He's a licensed rigger."

"I'll pack them over myself—then I'll know they'll open."

"Can't say that I blame you," Jake agreed. "It's your neck. The folding table is kinda cluttered up, but I can clear it off."

"Thanks."

They went inside the other hangar, and Jake flashed on the lights.

"Oh, by the way," Corey asked casually, "which ship are they using for the pickup tomorrow?"

"Armstrong's—that Consolidated over there. Banta was out this morning to rig up the hook."

"That's been changed," Corey announced, refraining from speaking the profane remarks passing through his head. "Riskoff's making the pickup. Which is his plane?"

Jake pointed to a low-wing cabin job.

Jake left, said he had to make his rounds and hang around the office in case the phone rang.

Corey worked feverishly, but preparations for the morrow took him until almost daylight. He removed the rope, which terminated in a three-prong grapple hook, from Armstrong's plane, and secured it to the landing gear of Riskoff's ship.

He remained inside the four-place cabin awhile, tinkering, then ran a wire out to where the rope was fastened to a strut, carefully concealing it in the stream-lined fairing. Interrupted occasionally by Jake making the rounds, he had to use the electric drill at odd moments. That job complete, he refolded the 'chutes. Then, using one for a pillow, he stretched himself on the table for a few hours of sleep.

COREY climbed out of the cockpit and stood on the wing of the biplane. Below, and to one side, were the two camera planes. Still farther down, at the two-thousand-foot level, was Riskoff in the pickup ship.

Corey waved his arm. There was an answering signal from each of the cameramen. Corey crouched on the trailing edge of the wing and stepped off into space.

He suddenly found he was enjoying himself hugely—that exhilarating sensation of the clean air whistling past his ears, of the earth rotating crazily, now above, now below, as he seemed to float, motionless, in space. For a few delicious moments he was a stunt man again, not a manhunter.

With regret he reached up and tugged at the ring over his breast. The harness tightened on him with a snap. Above him, clean white silk bellied out into the air.

Cameras ground away in the two planes spiralling down near-by, following his descent.

Riskoff's plane appeared below, flying directly toward him. Corey had an anxious moment of wondering whether that churning propeller would chew up his parachute. This was going to be close.

But Riskoff pulled up at the last moment—pulled up too high, nearly stalled. The hook missed.

The plane fell off on one wing and circled for another try, while Corey floated slowly toward the earth.

Closer than ever this time . . . . The parachute billowed in the prop wash as Riskoff flew close overhead, his landing gear skimming the silk. But the hook caught. One tine of the grapple pierced the silk and ripped its way through, to hold at the top vent-ring.

Corey reached for the shroud lines and started to climb as the camera planes closed in. Hand over hand he went up, six—eight—ten feet.

But it was hard going, impossible going. The weight of the extra 'chute strapped to his breast, the wind as he was dragged through the air at eighty miles an hour, spun him around like the tail of a kite.

Sliding back to the end of the shrouds, Corey fumbled with the buckles, shrugged out of the harness. The spare parachute, his sole measure of safety, was dropped.

Watching it fall, Corey made a quick estimate of his present altitude, now less than a thousand feet. He glanced upward at the plane from which he dangled, and cursed Riskoff. That fool, waving down at him from the cabin window, was pushing the stick forward, gently but steadily, losing precious altitude.

Corey began the climb again. Unencumbered, the shroud lines were easy. He went up them like a monkey up a pole. The silk was harder. The wind-filled folds of silk cloth offered nothing to grasp. Every hand-hold had to be fought for.

Suddenly a wet spray drenched Corey, almost blinded him before he could close his eyes. Gasoline! Riskoff had dumped his tanks.

The drone of the engines became a sputter, a barking cough, died out altogether with a gasp. Out of gas! Riskoff put the nose down immediately, just a bit more than was necessary to glide without danger of stalling.

Climbing feverishly, fighting for each hand-hold, Corey opened his smarting eyes and estimated the angle of glide—saw that Riskoff was heading for a flat space in the valley, five miles from the airport, and out of sight from it because of the intervening line of jagged hills.

They had less than four hundred feet of air under them when Corey's aching fingers clutched the hook. Riskoff was leaning out, watching, his swarthy face tense.

This was where Corey had planned to rest. He still had fifty feet of rope between him and the plane—less than four hundred feet between him and the ground. That ground was close enough now to look hard. It was generously sprinkled with stones. Emphatically, not a place to be dragged beneath a plane coming in for a dead-stick landing.

With aching fingers Corey grasped the rope and pulled himself up, hand over stiffening hand.

Riskoff stopped watching now. He pulled his head inside, and the plane side-slipped—lost two hundred feet in one sidewise swoop.

With the blood pounding in his temples, his lungs bursting from the exertion, Corey condemned Riskoff to the eternal fires and drove his numbing arms and hands ever upward. Reach, grab, pull up, reach again . . . . His compact body seemed to weigh a ton.

At last his fingers touched the knot, reached above it and grasped a landing-gear strut. Riskoff had already flattened out to land. Corey felt the ground dragging at his feet. With a last dispairing effort, he kicked his feet high over his head, caught a shoe over a strut, and locked it with his other foot. Then he straightened his arms and arched his back as the wheels touched and bounced.

WHEN the plane stopped rolling, Corey dropped the few inches to the ground, where he lay a moment, gasping, flexing his numbed fingers. He unbuckled his parachute harness and wriggled out, scrambled to his feet in front of the wing.

Overhead, the camera planes were circling madly, as if the pilots wondered whether to risk a landing in that small, clear space already occupied. One broke away presently and streaked for the airport.

Riskoff had already climbed from the cabin, was standing on the wing now, looking back over the ground on which his plane had just bounced—looking for Corey's body.

Corey stood up and said: "Here I am. Didn't you think I would make it?"

Riskoff swung around at the voice. His eyes bugged out like squeezed grapes. The blood drained from his tanned face. He forced a sickly smile and said:

"Gosh, I'm glad to see you again, old man. I had to land. Got so excited watching you climb that I kicked the gasoline dump-valve."

"You wouldn't do a thing like that on purpose?"

"On purpose? Man, are you crazy?"

"I was beginning to think so about the time that gasoline smacked me in the face," Corey snapped.

Then he noticed the blackjack partly concealed in Riskoff's palm.

"What was the sap intended for?" he asked. "To finish me off in case I was still breathing?"

Riskoff looked down guiltily. His face reddened. Then his lips twisted into a snarl, and he took a step forward, poised on the front of the wing, and raised the weapon over his head. He leaped, and the blackjack was swung in an arc meant to include Corey's head.

Corey stepped back quickly. His foot came down on a stone, and he fell over backwards, the cursing Riskoff on top of him, straddling his chest.

The first blow had missed. Clawing for Corey's face, Riskoff raised the other hand to strike again. Corey jerked his head aside, and the blackjack dented the hard ground beside his ear.

Corey freed an arm from under Riskoff's knee and threw a punch at the livid face snarling over him. Riskoff straightened, dodged the blow. But as he went back, Corey heaved one leg upward and locked the heel under his assailant's chin. Quickly he re-enforced that leg with the other one and pulled Riskoff over backwards.

Squirming quickly from under the weight of the other's haunches, Corey grabbed for a foot and locked a toe hold on the struggling director. Then he inched down until he had Riskoff's head between his thighs. Locking his feet, he poured on the agonizing pressure of a head scissors, changed Riskoff's curses to screams, then grunts, then gasps, as he twisted the captured toe.

Riskoff went limp. Corey untangled his legs and scrambled to his feet, picking up the fallen blackjack on the way.

A siren sounded in the distance.

With the pressure off his head, consciousness quickly returned to Riskoff. He sat up, blinking and gasping.

Corey stood over him and asked: "Do you want some more?"

Riskoff recoiled and shook his head.

After a moment, he said: "You've got nothing on me. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, spilling the gas was an accident, and you got sore about it and attacked me after we landed. That's my story—let's see you prove different."

"We'll see when that squad car arrives. It wouldn't be coming if I was wrong."

"So what?"

"I've got a movie camera concealed in the cabin of your plane, wired so it would start when your grapple picked up the weight of me and my 'chute. I installed it last night. It carries enough film for fifteen minutes—plenty of time to show how you tripped the gas, how you deliberately side-slipped to get down before I could finish the climb.

Riskoff paled, started to his feet.

Corey balanced the blackjack and told him to sit down, adding:

"I'll bet ten to one you tripped that gas dump on purpose, just like I'm betting you put Banta up to dropping Sowers—and all because Sowers had the goods on you on the Unamak stunt, and you were afraid Doris would sue you for half a million, and collect."

"You're nuts!" Riskoff jeered, but without conviction. "Why should I care if Doris does collect? The studio would pay—not me."

"Because you're the studio, or will be when Graulin kicks off, which won't be long. Any settlement would be just as good as out of your pocket, and plenty of murders have been committed for lesser stakes. You paid off Sowers for fifteen months, to keep his mouth shut. Then when he upped the ante, threatened to tell unless you came across, you and Banta killed him."

"You're bluffing!" Riskoff insisted weakly. "You can't prove I had anything to do with Sowers' death. Doris might sue me and collect; even you might, if that camera of yours was working, but you can't pin a murder rap on me, because you can't prove that Sowers didn't order that wire change himself."

THE police car rolled up. Lundgren jumped out, seemed surprised to see Corey still alive. After pounding his back, calling him a lucky stiff, he said:

"That camera stunt of yours sure is great stuff. I developed the roll you took at the studio, and had the mutes read it. They got every word Sowers said before he went up for his stunt, and there wasn't a thing said about changing the wire handling. Sowers was blackmailing Riskoff right before the camera—said if he didn't come across with a hundred grand, he would be a witness when Doris Poore sued. That's a good murder motive in any language. That's why I brought the cops."

Riskoff looked around, bewildered.

"That book I was carrying," Corey reminded him. "It was a prop book, with a movie camera inside."

"And that shot of Riskoff talking to Banta just before Sowers was killed," Lundgren continued, "showed Banta nodding and winking, while Asmus protested."

"That ought to make the case complete," Corey commented. "Especially since both Banta and Riskoff tried to kill me later."

"Say, when did you suspect this bird of ordering Banta to let Sowers drop?" Lundgren wanted to know.

"When Riskoff said Banta's hands were wire-burned, after I had seen they were not," Corey grinned. "The hunch got stronger when he asked me to do the stunt—stronger still when he said he'd fly the pickup plane himself. What a perfect setup for making murder look like an accident! By the way, that's one for the book—committing murder before witnesses and deliberately having the crime filmed for all the world to see."

"But why did you tackle the stunt, if you thought he would try to kill you?"

"Because I knew the cameras would be on me; that he would have to make it look like an accident. The only way to do that would be to rig the grapple to let go, or to make a quick landing and drag me. By rigging the grapple myself, I made that safe. I thought the extra 'chute would guard against the other contingency. But I had to drop the 'chute to make the climb. I took a big chance there, which I guess we'll have to blame to professional pride."

Protesting incoherently that he wanted to see his lawyer, Riskoff was led to the police car.

Corey said: "Don't forget, you owe me five thousand for this stunt, to say nothing of the fat settlement you'll have to make on Doris Poore and her baby for the botched-up job that killed Dick. That won't leave you much to pay your lawyer."

"Now what," asked the police sergeant, "would you do with five thousand dollars?"

"Wire my cameras for sound."

Officer Danny McFee suspected his beautiful wife of wearing . . . .

The Judas Brand

By Clem Beal

ABRUPTLY, Plainclothes man Danny McFee halted his swinging stride up the black tunnel of the alley. His forehead was festooned with clammy sweat at the belated thought that if the chief found him down there ahead of the others, it would be as good as evidence that he was tipping off "Digger" Charlie—especially if the trap should spring on thin air again. Danny McFee began silently calling himself names as he flitted once more toward the deserted dimly lighted waterfront street.

He was halfway up the gorgelike alley when the soft thud of hurrying feet ahead of him flattened his hard body against the side of the warehouse. He held his breath, striving to quiet the thumping of his heart as his eyes bored into the darkness.

A shadowy figure took brief outline as it hurried past; and Danny stood there weakly, staring with smarting eyes and a lump in his throat. Something like a groan vibrated from his tensed lips as he hesitated there, stricken motionless by this abrupt shattering of his convictions. For Olga had come — and her breathless haste told him in letters of fire against his brain on what mission she had come.

As though trying to recover from a physical blow, Danny shook his head like a spaniel until once more he could think clearly. Then he deliberately turned, easing after the slim figure that the darkness had swallowed. The police must not find Olga there. For himself, it didn't matter. But Olga—Somehow, he had to get her away before police bullets tore through her soft, young body.

A whisper of sound jerked him up rigidly. He peered around the corner in time to see the black outline of a narrow door swing shut in the river end of the warehouse. It was as though it had shut against the foolish happiness of the past year of his life.

Danny's long fingers clenched spasmodically, nails biting into his palms. His bronzed face burned, then blanched as the developments of the afternoon seared through his brain. The chief's terse warning grated again in his ears:

"I hate to say this, Danny, but I got to. Your wife was seen with Digger Charlie the very day we had our trap set for him. I'm warning you that if we fail again tonight, we'll have to investigate Olga's relations with him. We've kept tonight's showdown under cover, even from our own men. They won't know what it's all about till we get ready to go. If there's a leak this time—"

McFee had almost struck the chief, had mastered his rage just in time. White-faced, he had turned away, the fires of hell in his breast. For the chief was putting him and Olga on the spot with Digger Charlie.

Because Olga was not home when he returned at supper time, Danny found himself half believing that she was not on the level. For the first time, he wondered if he had not been a fool for marrying a girl about whom he knew nothing, other than the fact that he had found her working in a beer joint that was the known hangout of Digger Charlie.

But Danny knew that he had not expected to find Olga down here, trying to warn Digger Charlie of the police trap. He had come, just as a last resort, because he had previously visited every known resort of the dope smuggler and had not found her.

DANNY McFEE stole around the corner, glancing at the luminous dial of his watch. The chief and his men were due any minute, to set the trap, and Danny should have reported at headquarters ten minutes ago to join them. According to the tip-off, Digger Charlie would be rowing in from the tramp steamer out there in the river abreast the warehouse on the full of the tide, to cache his smuggled shipment of dope somewhere in the great, weather-beaten shell lurching out over the black water.

Catlike, McFee darted for the door, his feet silent on the floor of decayed wood and cinders. For a heartbeat of time he listened, heard the soft thud of cautious footsteps retreating into the cavernous maw of the great building. He heard the rumble of voices, and for an instant, light filtered dimly through the cracks of the door. Then he slipped inside, closing the door silently.

He crept forward into the stygian gloom, his direction gauged by the faint rustling movements ahead. He wanted to cry out in the agony of his heart, to call her name, but reason told him that it would mean suicide—and possibly death for Olga. Suppose the chief had deliberately lied to him about the time. Suppose the trap were already set, the chief and his men even now in ambush.

Like a hunger-desperate animal, Danny inched silently forward over the plank flooring. The sudden, loud gurgle of the river warned him in the nick of time of the opened trapdoor. Another step, and he would have plunged through. . . .

So abruptly as to be unreal, he heard Olga's voice, whispered, desperate with pleading: "You've got to believe me, I tell you. The police know about your plans tonight. They'll be here any minute. Would I run the risk of coming here, if I didn't know? Hurry, you fool! Warn Charlie and—and the others before it's too late."

"I suppose your cat-footing husband give you the dope; sent you down here as a special favor—he likes us so much!"

Danny recognized the sneering voice of Slim Breen, who was more ruthless than Digger Charlie himself, if that were possible.

"Yes, yes! It's on the level. Danny got it from headquarters just a few hours ago. I've been everywhere trying to find Charlie — in time. And now you only stand there and let them walk right into death."

"Listen, sister," Breen's voice rasped, "I don't know what your game is, but you're all wet. Right now, the flatfoots are sucking their thumbs across the river, waiting for the Digger to land the stuff there. We found the stool that's been leaking on us—and now he's *our* pigeon. We know how to handle things like that, the Digger and me. Why, he was just tickled to pieces to give the dicks a phony steer for us after we got through with him. That sneaking husband of yours has been making a fool out of you, if you ask me!"

Danny tensed, hardly believing his ears. So the chief *had* framed him—hadn't trusted him with tonight's racket, after all. The pulse at his temple throbbed fiercely for a moment, then subsided as cold anger rippled through his body. But he couldn't afford to think about that—now. There was work to be done that no one man had any business to tackle, unless he were tired of living. Danny McFee smiled faintly there in the darkness. The chief not only had tricked him—he had practically signed his death warrant at the same time. And McFee wondered how a man felt—after he had sent a man to his death.

Before he could plan his action, there came the muffled thump of oarlocks and the gurgling *swish* of water around carefully dipped blades.

"Stay right where you are, sister!" Breen's low-pitched voice grated. "Charlie'll be wanting to see you again."

The beam of a flashlight stabbed through the darkness, playing down into the water. Danny McFee was aware of vague relief that the lifted trapdoor threw his side of the opening into deep shadow.

The bow of a big skiff shot into the open, and Digger Charlie's squat body

vaulted through the trap, his thick face showing wolfishly for an instant in the blaze of light. He was followed by a younger man, whose slender body seemed to quiver with nervousness.

"We've got it!" Digger Charlie gloated, unbuttoning his coat to pat the bulging pockets of a canvas money belt. "Enough to net us ten grand . . . Who's that!" he snapped suddenly, blunt fingers darting for the automatic under his arm.

"Don't be so damned nervous!" Breen spat. "It's only the jane come to warn us about the dicks. She didn't know about the phony steer."

Digger Charlie lunged toward Olga and pulled her into the circle of light. Her eyes were big and luminous with fear. Her faltering voice ripped through Danny's heart.

"I warned you, like you said, Charlie. Now you've got to do your part—keep your promise."

"Sure, sure! But we can't hang around here. Come along, sweetheart. After I plant the snow, we'll run up to my place, eh? Maybe we'll celebrate a little, just to show there's no hard feelings."

Olga winced as his fingers bruised the tender flesh of her arm. Digger Charlie's grasp tightened. He laughed harshly, sneeringly; and at that laugh, something snapped in Danny McFee . . . .

LIKE a whip McFee's six feet of sinuous body snapped out of the shadow, clearing the trapdoor by a matter of inches. His arm flashed upward in a swinging arc, crashing a fist flush on the point of Digger Charlie's thick jaw.

The gangster's toes snapped from the floor, and he piled up with a thud at the feet of Breen. McFee whirled just as Breen's flashlight clattered to the floor, plunging the great empty shell into darkness.

A spurt of flame blasted Danny McFee sideways, sent him reeling as Breen's slug tore through his shoulder. He heard Olga's scream and steadied with a tremendous effort, clattering away a few steps to draw Breen's fire out of her direction. Awkwardly he clutched his automatic, striving to steady it in the unfamiliar grip of his left hand. His eyes were smarting and temporarily blinded from bursting flame. If Olga would only steal away and give him a clear field, so he could shoot it out with the rats.

Faintness gripped him so suddenly that he swayed and dropped hastily to a knee. He was conscious of the abrupt silence all at once, and wondered desperately if he were losing his senses. The automatic was getting so heavy that he could hardly hold it. And then he heard a slowly relaxed breath in the direction where he had last seen Breen.

Deliberately, forcing his strength, McFee steadied the automatic, finger waving on the trigger. He shook his head pettishly as though to scatter the enveloping mist from his eyes. And then, directly in front of him, flame belched from the floor, and he heard Breen shriek above the deafening report and the thud of his falling body.

"You lousy double-crosser," Digger Charlie's voice whispered. "You've had it coming for a long time. And you ain't the only one."

Danny kept a trancelike quiet, eyes boring through the darkness, ears straining to catch the sound of Digger Charlie's rising body. He prayed silently that Olga had escaped, knew in his heart that she was still waiting. And apparently the third man was waiting, too—waiting for Danny's fire to give away his position.

Mind and body tortured, Danny tried to think. But it was like trying to think himself out of a tomb. His mind should have been concentrated on the two blood-hungry gangsters. Instead, it was torturing itself with images of Olga, who should have been trying to escape.

Suddenly a light stabbed out of the darkness on his left, a tiny button of light that filled the great shell with eerie shadows, but etched the crouched figure and snarling face of Digger Charlie, automatic pointing—and just back of him, his companion, white faced, shaking.

McFee's gun spat lead, even as Digger Charlie whirled to wreak slug vengeance upon the owner of that betraying light.

The gangster's squat bulk quivered, swayed, pitched to the floor.

Danny McFee heard Olga's scream as he turned to square accounts with the survivor of the crooks. The slim young man stood rooted to the spot near the trapdoor. His face was ghastly in the dim light. But he did not move, even when Danny's gun menaced him.

With a swish of skirts that distracted Danny's attention, Olga threw herself in front of the gangster, holding the glare of her tiny flashlight in Danny's eyes. And then, abruptly, Danny's vision cleared, and the snarl in his throat turned to a creak of anguish. He realized that he was sick—sick to death.

THE crashing entrance of the police drowned out Olga's heart-broken words, but in the glare of their powerful light Danny could see her lips moving. And when Danny fell, he didn't know whether Olga's arms were around him, or those of the chief. He only knew that his head was cradled against something tremulous and soft.

The chief bent to catch his words, tried to grin understandingly.

"Olga's brother—helped me—saved my life. Don't mix him up with—this. Chief—"

The chief leaned over him, face drawn.

"Yes, Danny boy?"

"Go to hell!" Danny whispered—and slumped. . . .

An hour later, his shoulder probed and bandaged, Danny leaned against the cushions of his white, iron bed and tried to smoke a cigarette. The nurse glanced at Olga's tear-wet face again and hastily left the room. Olga walked over to gaze down at him, timidly, adoringly.

"Danny, darling—how long have you known about—about my brother? I tried so hard to keep it from you, to save you trouble—and tried so hard to save him from Digger Charlie. He promised to let Larry alone, if I'd tell him all I knew about the police. Oh, Danny, I never meant to deceive you; I only wanted to save him."

Danny's eyes squinted painfully. Slowly he released a long held breath. He groped for her hand.

"If I'm dreaming, sweetheart, don't wake me up. If I'm not, just remind me tomorrow that I'm the luckiest fool that ever saw red. And now, I'm going to sleep. That seems to be the only time I do any thinking—when I'm passing out."

A Snitch in Time

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn

By Joe Archibald

Author of "The Morgue the Merrier," "G-man Friday," etc.

A shady citizen drops a TNT bomb on Abigail's tepee—demolishing a first-rate garden and a second-rate gardener. And Iron Jaw rushes out to make a pinch. But Snooty and Scoop, crackpot newshawks, read the funny papers for a dizzy clue.

IT all happened one time in the Hub because of Abigail Hepplethwaite who is a quaint old doll living in Back Bay. Abigail could easily balance the U. S. A. budget if it came to a crisis and still have enough rocks left over to build another wall around China. Me and Snooty Piper are well acquainted with the opulent old girl as we have crossed her path quite frequently in our very feverish pursuit of news for Mr. Gumpy who owns the *Evening Star*.

One day, without any warning, Abigail decides to organize the women of Beantown to suppress crime at its very roots which, of course, means the young citizen body of the metropolis. Consequently, Abigail steps on the pedal digits of many taxpayers when she makes her first speech in the Copley Plaza. Me and Snooty Piper attend the first important meeting of the Hepplethwaite Society of Crime Prevention, and Mr. Guppy says it is a very wonderful work she is doing and for us to cooperate in every way.

"First," Snooty says, "Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy should be discharged. Crime would then be reduced seventy-five per cent. I will suggest that to Abigail."

"You keep your traps shut at that meeting," Dogface, our city editor, blasts at us. "I do not understand Mr. Guppy sometimes. He would send a wolf out to hunt for a lost lamb."

"I must remind you," Snooty says loftily, "that Abigail asked that no other journalists but me and Scoop be at the meeting. Now play that one on your zither. Come on, Scoop."

It is quite a gathering in the Copley Plaza. Abigail makes a very potent speech that does not spare some very respected citizens to say the least.

"I will not waste time dolling up the King's English," she chirps, waving her lorgnette around like she is warding off gnats. "We will start right in to discuss the causes of juvenile delinquency. What is the reason for the overcrowding of the reform schools? I got the liver scared out of me only yesterday afternoon. I came out of my front gate and fell over three kids tossing the galloping dominoes. I pick myself up and one says for me to beat it you old antique or we will put a finger on you. Imagine it? Galloping dominoes—"

"Wha-a-a-t?" a very haughty blue-blooded dame interrupts.

"Dice to you," Abigail glowers. "Don't you ever read? Stop interrupting. I'm running this meeting."

"Ha, ha," laughs Snooty and I kick him in the shins.

"That's what starts the young generation on a career of crime," Abigail goes on. "They sell the kids dice, playing cards and roulette wheels on their way home from Sunday school. They play cops and robbers and nobody wants to be the cop. Oh I'll put a stop to this! I'll stop those movies from letting the potential tax payers in blouses see movies of gang molls and choppers. Then there's the newspaper that comes into our best homes. The *Evening Star*. Mr. Guppy will hear from me. I will wash up every bit of advertising he gets if he doesn't toss out two of those so-called comic strips he runs. Pick up an *Evening Star* any night, girls—"

"She would call a tapir a field mouse," Snooty whispers. "Girls! Ha—"

"Piper!" Abigail roars, "One more crack out of you, and I'll toss you out on your ear."

All is quiet and the old girl goes on: "That strip I mean is called 'Hot Spots in the Lives of Public Enemies.' It is a disgrace. What is the matter with depicting the lives of honest citizens? No! Mr. Guppy knows the kids go for that tripe because they get a kick out of seeing guns going off and knocking off honest citizens. I will personally see to it that Mr. Guppy throws out that other thing he calls a comic strip. 'Guttersnipe Gertie!' All about a gangster's moll who starts hitting cops with slingshots when she is only six years old. It is a disgrace. No wonder a lot of citizens who have not yet even voted are ready for the hot squat, ladies."

ME and Snooty see a lot of the very rich dames looking at each other like what they have heard is all over their noggins. But Abigail is not daunted. She says she will have every hock shop in Beantown fine-combed for gats so that rough characters cannot get them to rub out honest tax payers. She will have every neighborhood movie censored too, she says, before the little citizens can get a gander at them.

"Mr. Guppy is going to be quite burned up with all this," Snooty observes to me. "Gertie is a very good circulation bet anyway you look at her. I will miss it. I—er—I mean it will give us lower stipends, I imagine."

"Wait until the howls start," I says. "Abigail has started something quite as bad as anything could be."

"I will build club houses out of my own pocket if I have to," the old dame goes on, "To keep the coming generation out of junk yard huts and gutters. I intend to stamp out crime among the juveniles if it puts me in the poorhouse. Are you with me, ladies of the Hepplethwaite Society of Crime Prevention?"

All the old girls nod, and it is a good bet that if any one of them did not, Abigail would have made a "yes woman" out of her with a buffet from her lorgnette in very short order. The meet-

ing adjourns and me and Snooty go up to the rostrum to chat with Abigail.

"Well, boys," she chortles, "was that hot enough for you? Guppy will be in a strait-jacket by midnight, ha ha."

"I would give up the limousine and buy an army tank to go shopping in if I was you," Snooty says. "I imagine certain tax payers would go to any end to render you defunct, Ab—er—Miss Hepplethwaite."

"They will have to use dynamite," the old girl snorts. "In my time I've fallen six stories to a cement sidewalk; stepped in front of a truck once and helped to carry the driver to the hospital. I stayed under water for twenty minutes when I fell off a bridge some years back, but they brought me around all right. What could hurt me?"

It is quite a laugh me and Snooty have with Abigail, and then she takes us where we want to go without us even saying where to put us off. The limousine stops at the Greek's.

"How did you guess we were goin' here?" Snooty asks her.

"Would I have to be smart to know that a cat would like to go to a fish market?" the snappy old dame chirps. "Hurry up, boys, and get out. I have just time enough to get to the Old Howard. Write up what I said and don't spare the horses, will you?"

"She is quite a character, isn't she, Scoop?" Snooty says to me. "I can't wait until Mr. Guppy reads what we write."

It is two hours later that we turn in our copy, and who is pacing around very nervously waiting to read it but Mr. Guppy as well as Dogface Woolsey.

"Great old girl—Abigail," Mr. Guppy chirps as we hand the stint to him. "Yessir, Abigail is one in a million. Heart of gold—shows you the regard she has for me. No other reporters allowed to—er—what's this, Piper!" he suddenly trumpets. "Look here, Binney, is this a joke? Well—by—you're fired! Get out of here or—"

"Keep your camisole on," Snooty tosses at the owner of the *Evening Star*. "If you think we're kidding, call up Abigail Hepplethwaite. Go on, I dare you. Ha, we have reported her speech word for word, Mr. Guppy, and that is what we were hired to do. Just pick up the 'phone—"

MR. GUPPY does what Snooty dares him to do, and in just two minutes he throws the thing against the wall and goes into a violent rhumba.

"She can't do this to me!" he howls. "She says she'll hand me plenty more if I don't toss out those comic strips, Woolsey. Why, Guttersnipe Gertie is—why, we'd lose twenty thousand readers over night! And the gangster stuff—they're howling for it. It's a dirty trick! Why that old war horse, that shriveled up human pecan, I'll—"

"Great old girl," Snooty mumbles, "one in a million, Scoop. Salt of the earth—"

Mr. Guppy gets very ugly about it all, and he and Dogface Woolsey chase us out of the city room and clear down the street. We pause for breath near a hydrant on Cornhill and who happens along but a very large citizen wearing a derby hat that looks too small for his noodle although we are sure it would hold three pecks of potatoes. It is Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy, who is on the payroll of The Hub as a detective which makes him liable any minute to apprehension as a citizen who is obtaining legal tender under false pretenses. Iron Jaw could not find a pachyderm's footprints if it walked across Fenway Park in a foot of snow.

"Good evening, Iron Jaw," Snooty says. "Your licorice seems to be on fire."

"Why, that is his cigar," I says. "He does not even waste the ashes as when the rope burns down as far as his teeth, he just rubs the residue over them and thus saves toothpaste. You are very thrifty, aren't you, Iron Jaw—even when it comes to catching criminals?"

"Don't get wise, blubbermouths," the flatfoot bellows. "What I want is the lowdown on the Hepplethwaite dame. What's she doin' buttin' in on us to stop crime, huh? Oh, I heard you were the only type lice there."

"Why it seems that Abigail is getting impatient with such law enforcers as you, Iron Jaw," Snooty explains. "There was

one part of her speech that I bet was meant only for you. It was about raising your pay."

"Yeah? Well, I knew I'd get what I was worth some day," Iron Jaw beams. "Well, well."

"Uh huh," Snooty nods solemnly. "She says you are worth twice your pay if they will only lock you up every time there is a case to be solved."

The pavement massager's derby pops off his big noggin and bangs down onto it again. We are both running when he picks up the ashcan and lifts it over his dome to toss it at us. The lid comes off and Iron Jaw stands there while the accumulated trash of many hours cascades down over his big carcass. We leave him in quite a mess.

It is the next day that all the citizens who have been stepped on by Abigail's speech start howling indignantly through the columns of the fourth estate. Newspapers, hock shop magnates, and flicker tycoons of The Hub are very testy regarding the old girl to say the least. Everybody is going to sue her and Abigail comes right back and says to get ready to meet her mouthpieces in any court that is open.

"I will fight to my last *sou*," she concludes via all the journals. "I will show certain citizens that I am no pushover and mean what I say. When you kill ants, you have to mash their eggs too. That is the way I intend to beat the tough boys in Boston. Abigail Hepplethwaite challenges the underworld and the citizens who aid and abet the development of future hot squat fodder. If Mr. Oswald Guppy and other honest taxpayers got their tootsies trodden on, let them clean up their own houses before they start bellyaching about the dirt handed out by the rough characters."

"Boys," Snooty says, "they're screwy to put up their dukes with Abigail. Look, it says here that the citizens are already campaigning with the old doll and that the women are going to boycott the sales of tin heaters and such. They will also stop reading the journals that countenance such alleged comic strips as Guttersnipe Gertie, etcetera. Abbie is sittin' on a powder keg, don't you think?"

"I will make a bet that the old girl won't be the one who goes up in the air," I says. "But I would just as soon not call on her for the next few days, Snooty. I hear she is putting in safety glass all around in the windows of her hut."

"Well, it is going to be fun, ha ha," Snooty chuckles. "I think I will go out and see her in a day or so."

"That shows good sense," I counter with extreme sarcasm. "You would go into Spain and try to sell Soviet linen to the Spaniards who are trying to get into Madrid. Well, you will go alone, you hear?"

IT is just then that Snooty gives me the office to lock up the old larynx as two rough citizens have just come into the grog shop and are sitting in the booth back of us. One of the uncouth boys start getting a load of very vitriolic adjectives anent Abigail off his chest and it is a cinch to us now that the old girl has stirred up a nest of worry for herself.

"The noive of the old screwball," a tough character grinds out, "What is the underwoild goin' to do fer recroots, huh, Fish Mouth? Who's goin' to case the joints fer us an' who's goin' tuh steal tires for our boilers? That dame will have all the young brats in clubhouses an' she will buy 'em baseball suits an' stuff. We ain't got a chance, see?"

"Yeah. It is only a couple hours ago I lose two kids I been teachin' my business to. Liftin' autos. Spike, we gotta do somethin'."

"A guy don't git a chance to make a livin' without some blue-nosed old doll hornin' in. Maybe we ought to give her the woiks."

"Nah. She owns dis boig, Mayor and all. That's too risky."

"Cut it. I t'ink dere's two newspaper slugs in here," one of the rough characters says.

"Come on, Mr. Binney," Snooty says. "We'd better get back to the tannery and smoke some more hides, don't you think?" The crackpot winks at me as we ankle

out. Sometime Snooty forgets and uses his dome.

It is the fourth day after that that we both argue with a flunkey at Abigail's gate. I only wish I knew what is the hold Snooty Piper has over me.

"Don't bandy words with me, my man," Snooty blats when the menial citizen refuses to let us get even a smell at the front door of the swanky tepee. "You are talking to G-men, understand?"

"H-huh?"

"Yeah, and here's my badge. Take a good look and admit us at once," Snooty yips.

"Well—er—mistakes will h-happen," the gink says.

"Snooty Piper," I husk, "I will ask you just once more to throw that badge into the Charles River. If you don't, I'll squeeze all the air out of your lungs via your neck, you—"

"Shut up, Scoop. I have a feeling Abigail is in grave peril. Look—there is a plane overhead. It—"

Blam! Bla-a-a-a-a-a-am! It is no Fourth of July torpedo that goes off. Me and Snooty and Abigail's flunkey flatten out against the sod like dried otter pelts, and the whole Hepplethwaite estate shakes like a dish of jello toted by a waiter with the jitters. Pieces of real estate, parts of trees, and big chunks of an ell of Abigail's house rain down upon us; and Snooty Piper has even got a goldfish wriggling down inside his vest when we open our eyes.

"Somethin' blew up," I gasp, quite gaga. "I told—you—that—Abigail—"

"It was the plane," Snooty gulps. "Droppin' bombs. Look, there's a little parachute comin' down! Hurry, we must get to Abigail."

We run toward the big shack and out of the front door bursts Abigail with some fire tongs in her hands. The old doll is quite indignant about the mess they have made of her backyard.

"The dirty crooks!" she fumes. "If they washed up my begonias, I will track them to the ends of the earth. Come on, boys, let's look at the damage."

DAMAGE is not the word for it. It is ruin in any language. There is a hole in Abigail's backyard big enough for Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy and three police forces to hide in. Her fish pond has been splashed all over the landscape and all kinds of tropical fish are practicing the crawl stroke on dry land. Half of the Hepplethwaite rock garden is chewed up, and a corner of the swanky palace looks quite as if a steam roller had dropped through it. There is a wild-eyed bosco sitting in the ruins holding onto his dome and Abigail says it is a new houseman she hired.

He gets up and says to the old doll: "I would like my wages, if you don't mind. I don't care for it here."

Now it is not very funny even if Snooty Piper does laugh, because quite close to the addled citizen is a male garden tender who has tended his last garden. He is unquestionably defunct due to having been nudged on the noggin by a piece of masonry that would have plugged up the Straits of Gibraltar.

"It is murder," Abigail screeches. "Call the police! Oh, somebody will sweat for this. Piper, get busy. Go inside and call up somebody."

"Look," I says, "hanging from that tree. It is a message the tough character dropped." I run over and get the parachute and there is a big iron bolt hanging to the ropes of it. Around the bolt is tied a note, and I bring the whole works over to Abigail. In a couple of seconds she is reading the *billet doux* to us.

"Now I *am* mad," she tosses out suddenly. "The dirty—"

"I should think you would be," I offer. "The high-flying criminal did more than just dig up a divot here."

"Listen," Abigail says when Snooty gets back. "It says 'Lay off, you old battle axe, or the next time we will get really rough!' "

"It is because of your crusade, all right," Snooty divines. "Well, the police are on their way post haste, Miss Hepplethwaite. Iron Jaw is accompanying them."

"Battle axe, am I?" Abigail snorts.

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"That is too much. If I ever get my hooks on that assassin—"

There is not much to be done until the gendarmes arrive but help put goldfish back into what is left of the pond. After launching a gasping fish or two, Snooty Piper asks to see the note. He looks it over quite thoroughly as if he really thought he was a detective.

"I suppose you know who did it," the old girl says with sarcasm.

"I might have a good idea," he retorts just as two carloads of big policemen arrive.

Iron Jaw gets out and takes a gander at the shambles. "Looks like you had an explosion, Miss," he says.

"Ha ha," the moneyed dame says, "the houseman was smoking a loaded cigar, O'Shaughnessy. It is really nothing at all. What do you think?"

"What're you two mush-faces doin' here?" the big flatfoot bays as he catches sight of us. "How did you get here so sudden?"

"The stork brought us," Snooty comes back. "Don't you think you should look around?"

"Any footprints?" the slewfoot asks.

"The criminal would have to be quite long-legged, chump," Abigail snaps. "He was in an airplane, Iron Jaw. That ought to be over your head, oughtn't it?"

"What's that you've got, Piper?" Iron Jaw trumpets while he looks at the defunct flunkey. "Hand it over. I have told you enough times now to keep your mitts off evidence. Give it here!"

"Why of course," Snooty says airily. "I was keeping it for you, Iron Jaw."

"Ha-a-ah!" the flatfoot explodes. "It's covered with fingerprints. The guy is as good as in the can already."

"Piper did not handle the letter with his feet," Abigail remarks.

THE big detective gets very temperamental then and takes off his derby and planks it down on part of the ruins. He swears he will have Snooty arrested for aiding and abetting a criminal to escape justice, and then he slips on a goldfish and does quite a back flop. When

he gets up, Abigail tells him to please stop clowning as he is killing her.

"Yeah? Well, who left this hat here?" Iron Jaw trumpets. "Everybody has his on. This one fell out of the plane and—"

"That is your own derby," Abigail tells him. "You put it there just a minute ago. How could you mistake that soup kettle, huh?"

Iron Jaw is really no good to anybody for the next few minutes. When he stops pawing at his pan, he suddenly spots the parachute. He grabs at it and looks it over very thoroughly. Suddenly the overstuffed man-tracker ejaculates with much zeal.

"I'm dumb, huh?" he rumbles. "Well, I will show you smart crackers. I will make an arrest before nightfall."

"I can keep a secret," Abigail whispers. "What did you find?"

"Read the papers," Iron Jaw snaps and stamps away shoving the 'chute into his pocket. "Take care of the remains, boys. Well, you galley slaves you," he says to us, "this is one time I will beat you to the handshakes, ha ha! I can feel sergeant's stripes on my sleeve now."

"I will make a bet it will only be gravy stains," Snooty argues. "Scoop, I wonder did we miss anything?"

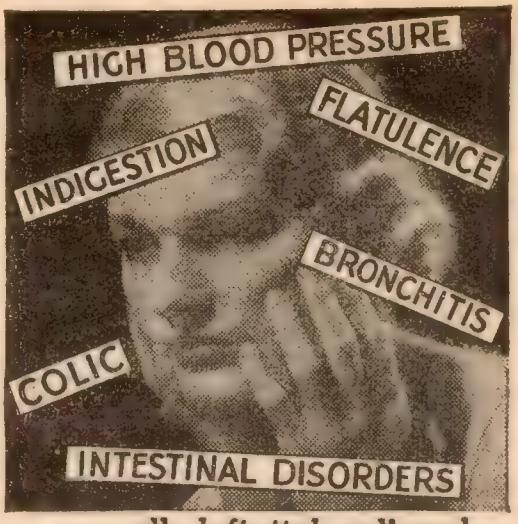
"It could happen. I missed a train once," I says.

"Well, Miss Hepplethwaite," Snooty says, ignoring me. "I am afraid there is nothing Scoop Binney and I can do. We will be seein' you. We've got to rush in our story of the *blast edition*, ha ha. Get it?"

"I am afraid so," Abigail counters. "Excuse me as I must call up some carpenters and landscape gardeners. And you can tell the public I have just begun to fight."

"She has more moxie than a champion duke swinger, Snooty," I marvel as we ankle away.

Snooty and I go to the Greek's and stay there until the late afternoon editions come out. Right on the front page of the *Evening Star* is a headline that would scare hair out of a fish. "Cinema owner held for murder," it screeches. "Detective O'Shaughnessy of the Boston



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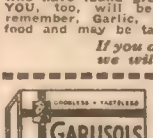

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STANDARD CLUB, BOX C - GRAYS LAKE, ILLINOIS

police force arrests J. Limpid Squeamish as alleged perpetrator of air raid on Hepplethwaite mansion. Clue on parachute leads to Squeamish door." The story goes on to say that Iron Jaw discovered that the striped cloth used for the 'chute had been taken off the back of one of the seats in the Paradox cinema in Chelsea. Iron Jaw went on to say that he had attended Mr. Squeamish's theatre regularly and that Mr. Squeamish specialized in gangster pictures. It says further that Iron Jaw is putting Squeamish through a very gruelling third degree and promises to either wring a confession out of him by nightfall or wring his neck. Squeamish denies any knowledge of the air raid and says flatly that he hired no one to drop the high-charged egg down on Abigail's manor. He admits movie ticket sales have dropped off to an alarming degree, but he claims to have decided to take it even if he didn't like it. He also admits that one or two of the cloth coverings on his cinema seats have disappeared but could not explain why.

"Looks like the big porpoise has got something there," I says. "Just let's forget all about it, Snooty. Iron Jaw had to do something right for once. Squeamish must have hired a citizen to—"

Snooty Piper is very aggravating at times. He just flips the pages of the newspaper over and reads other items of news that cannot hold a candle to the Hepplethwaite outrage. It is when he is nonchalantly reading the latest exploit of Guttersnipe Gertie that I show my irritation. "Only a moron would find amusement in such a thing," I says.

SNOOTY acts like I am not there and pulls out the letter that was dropped by the citizen in the plane. I tell him to take it down to headquarters at once as that is where evidence belongs.

"Iron Jaw tossed it away," the crackpot says, "so I thought I'd—why this is very interesting to say the least, Scoop. A plane crashed out in Saugus this afternoon and the pilot was burnt to a crisp."

"Read me some nice axe murders," I sniff. "I'm just dying for a laugh, you nitwit."

"We will go out and see the wreck," Snooty says. "I have no end of a hunch. It is maybe the plane that serenaded Abigail with the TNT."

"How many planes are there in the U. S.?" I scowl. "Not more than a thousand at the least."

I do not know why, but I accompany Snooty out to Saugus where there are the remains of a flying wagon in a field.

"It's a cinch nobody could ever tell what the crate looked like before it nudged terra firma," Snooty says. "I think I will loiter here until nightfall. It is very peculiar that no tax payers would hear such a crash, and that the citizen who flew the crate could pick out such a nice landing field to crash on."

Two hours later, when we are alone in the meadow, Snooty says: "If there is a country boneyard near here, Scoop, I think I will uncover an amazing plot and expose the whole thing to the public. Let's look about."

Now we do not have to look very far before we walk right in on a rustic boneyard that has several graves covered with moss. But there is one stone that is quite fresh from the marble works and it is jutting out of a fresh mound of dirt.

"A ghoul has been here," Snooty says. "Maybe last night. We will go to the nearest house and ask if a funeral has taken place around here of late."

"Snooty Piper, come clean," I says. "What is working inside your dome besides cuckoos?"

"In due time," Snooty says as he leads me three miles across the fields to a farmhouse. It is there that we learn that a citizen was buried in the boneyard out in the bosky dell not more than a week previous.

"That clinches it," Snooty says. "I will have the mug who raided the Hepplethwaite estate inside twenty-four hours."

That night Snooty calls up New York and asks for a citizen whose name is Oscar P. Migley. The name is very vaguely familiar, but at the moment I do not catch on. Snooty comes out of the booth and says that Oscar is in Boston for a spell and is staying at the Statler.

"It all ties up," the green-suited news-

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hound says to me. "We will call on Oscar."

"How about calling in some good gendarmes to accompany us, Snooty?" I ask. "After all it is not Shirley Temple we are dealing with, is it?"

"Oscar should prove very harmless," Snooty says. "He is not the criminal type, but desperation drove him to such very drastic methods. Squeamish will be suing Iron Jaw in very few hours. Follow me!"

I DO and not twenty minutes later we are admitted to a room in the Statler Hotel. A bosco is sitting in a corner with a drawing board propped up in his lap and I take one gander at the drawings he is making and let out a squeak. It is Oscar Migley who draws Guttersnipe Gertie, and it seems to me that he is not quite up to form at the moment as his lunch-hooks are quite jittery.

"Good evening," he says. "I suppose you want my autograph?"

"No," Snooty says, "but the police force does, Oscar. The game is up. You had better come along quietly—"

"Huh?" Oscar's pen falls into his lap, and then the comic artist picks up the drawing board and tries to puncture it with Snooty's noggin. I bang him over the scalp with a steel T-square, and Oscar folds up like a camp stool and lets out a very tired sigh.

"He is not a criminal type," Snooty says. "You notice he gave up without a struggle."

"I would not like to tangle up with Oscar when he was mad, then," I says. "How did you do it, Snooty?"

"Oh, it was quite simple," he says. "I knew it was Oscar when I read the letter he dropped down for Abigail. Now you notice that when most of the funny citizens draw their strip for the day they put a date in the corner of one of the panels? In India ink, Scoop. Now look at the latter here. On the back of it is a line that looks like a C and right under it is the date 6-26. Now Oscar placed that paper over his daily stint while he was planning the surprise for Abigail. He thought it was thoroughly dried, but the toe of Gertie's gangster boy friend made

the mark that looked like a C. All we have to do is wait until the strip comes out dated 6-26 which is a month from now as the cartoonists are always a month or so ahead in their work. The imprint on the back of the warning message should fit."

I sit down and hold my dome in my hands. Oscar Migley comes to and gets very contrite and says it was he who did it all right.

"The old battle axe was ruining my career," he moans. "The papers were starting to cancel on me, and I could see a thousand per flying out of my window. So I figured I would put a scare into the old girl and cooked everything up with a friend of mine who owned a crate up here. That guy that was burned up in the ship was dead before—ah, I must've been nuts. But we had to figure a way to destroy the plane and have the remains of a pilot in it. I didn't figure the fathead would rub anybody out. I told him just to drop the bomb in back of the house."

"Well, I imagine Guttersnipe Gertie is washed up," Snooty says. "Let's go over to talk to the boys at headquarters, Oscar. They will want to know your accomplice. I imagine he comes from Chelsea, Oscar, and attended Mr. Squeamish's cinema too, to get ideas, ha!"

Oscar does as we tell him. Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessey tries to soft soap Mr. Squeamish while they release the cinema mogul from the cage, but Mr. Squeamish cannot see it the flatfoot's way. He steals a night stick from a gendarme's hand and breaks it over the big snooping citizen's cocoa.

"Ha ha," laughs Oscar, "if I could only put that in a strip! When I get out I will know a new character to start over with. I will call the strip 'Satchelfoot, the great Defective!' How long do you think I will get, boys?"

"Well, the sentence I'd guess at," Snooty says, "won't see a period at the end of it for ten years. Come on, Scoop. We must go and report to Mr. Guppy. It is very lucky for Abigail that Oscar was not a real criminal type, isn't it?"

What is the use? Snooty will never get very bright I am afraid.

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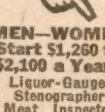

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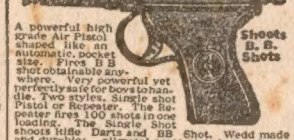

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Similar to the CCC ring. Only with Navy emblem. USN in bold relief with anchor. Silver appearance, 25c. Sterling Silver, $1.00. 14 kt Gold with Sterling Emblem, $1.75.

U.S. ARMY RING

Similar to CCC ring, only with Army emblem. A large, oversize ring. Silver appearance, 25c. Sterling Silver, $1.00. 14 kt Gold with Sterling Emblem, an effective contrast. $1.75.

AVIATION RING

Similar to CCC ring, with Aviation Emblem. A smart, snappy ring that you will be proud to wear. 14 kt Gold with Sterling Emblem, an effective contrast. $1.75.

LUMINOUS PAINT

LUMINOUS PAINT, when applied to any object, emits rays of white light, rendering it visible in the dark. The darker the night the brighter it shines. Simple to use—you can do it! Apply some to the dial of your watch so you can tell time at night. Paint door buttons, switches, anything, everything with it. Small Bottle, 25c. Medium size 50c. Large size $1.00 postpaid.

SILENT DEFENDER

Used by police officers, deputy sheriffs, and night watchmen as a means of protection. Up 6 feet. Easily fits the hand. Useful in an emergency. Aluminum. Wt. 2 oz. Pocket size, 25c. 2 for 45c.

Learn DANCING

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LATEST STEPS. Be popular. Good dancers are always invited—always popular guests. Partners welcome them eagerly. The newest, smartest way without a teacher. Don't make excuses when the music starts. Get lots of fun from parties and dances. If you want to become a perfect dancer, learn to dance at home in this new easy way. BOOK TELLS: How to develop poise and control, improve your dance steps, art of holding, how to walk to music, how to lead, how to set for trot steps, Natural and Reverse Turns, the Reverse Wave. The Quickstep swaying to music. Waltz. Backward changes, the Continental, The famous Kiss dance, the Manhatten, the Collegiate, Columbia, Conga, Charleston, etc., etc. 101 Illustrations. Art of Dancing, price 25 cents postpaid.

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Did you ever lose or forget your keys? Probably many times. Don't worry any more about lost keys (or any keys, for that matter), as these master keys will open almost any ordinary lock. Five different keys for various types of locks. Will save their cost in you only use them once, but you'll probably find them so handy that you'll always carry them.

5 MASTER KEYS price 25c

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THRIFT VAULT Similar in appearance to the above only made of welded steel, and slightly larger. Packed in a box, with complete directions for opening. Price, ppd $1.25

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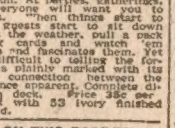

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What will it bring for you? What will happen? Let Madam Le-Normand's Fortune Telling Cards predict the future! Just get a deck and friends for miles around will want to get in on the fun. At parties, gatherings, evenings, etc., everyone will want you to tell their fortunes. When chimes start to slow up and the guests start to sit down and grumble about the weather, pull a pack of fortune telling cards and watch 'em sit up! It interests and fascinates them. Yet there is nothing difficult to telling the futures—every card is plainly marked with its meaning and the connection between the cards becomes at once apparent. Complete directions with each deck. Price 35c per deck. Deluxe deck with 53 ivory finished cards. 75c. postpaid.

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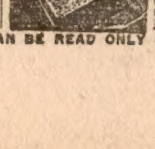

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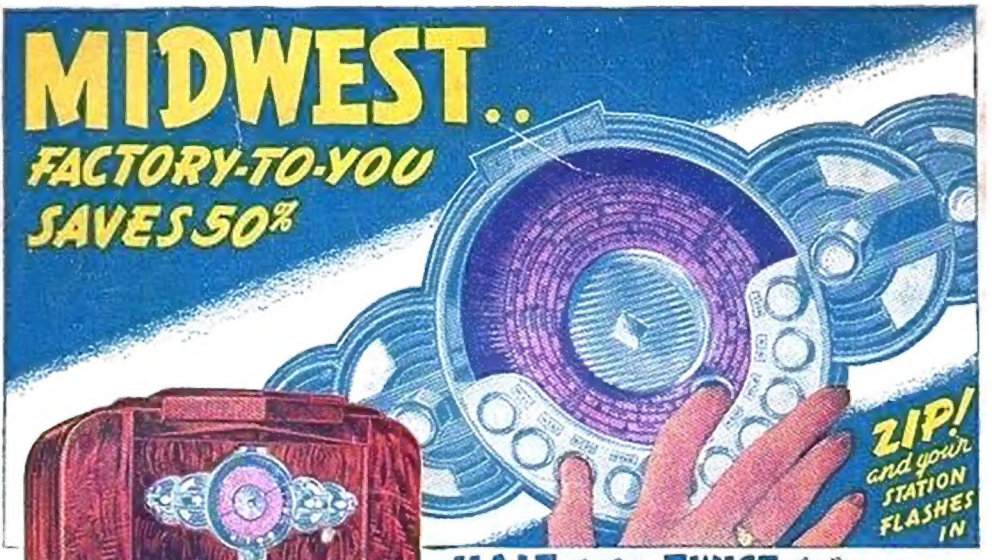

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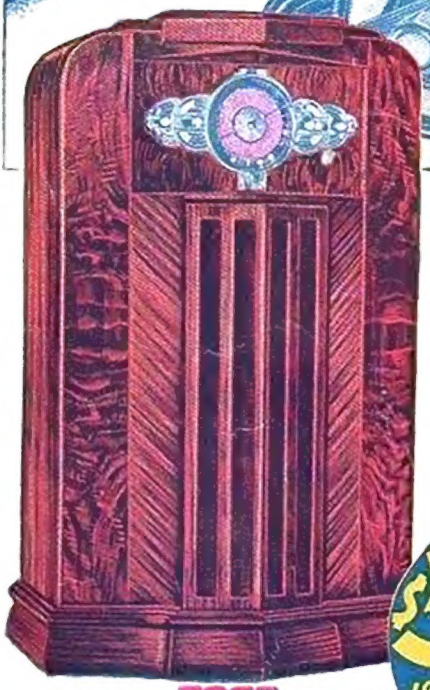

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